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Collector's Edition No. 3

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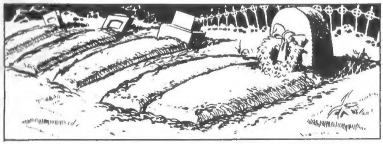
COMIC STRIPS AND HORROR



THE SEARCH FOR A HAPPY MEDIUM

BY JAMES VAN HISE

Horror is not something which has come naturally to the comic strip, although the search to find its most effective form in the equanimity of comics has been a very long one, and one in which the failures far outweigh the successes.

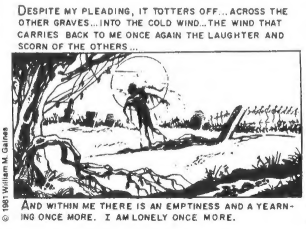
Although many other types of comic strips have their origins in the newspaper strips which would ultimately spawn the comic book itself, the grim, reckless world of horror was never really adapted by that medium. Alex Raymond had the occasional monster in *Flash Gordon*, but this was within the adventure format and actual horror in that and other science fiction comic strips was never really attempted. The monster was just one more obstacle for the hero to surmount with his wits and his blaster, and the more creepy aspects of the encounter, which were simultaneously being explored in the Thirties in *Astounding Stories* by A.E. Van Vogt's "Black Destroyer" and John W. Campbell's "Who Goes There" would be left for the movies to capitalize on.

Horror in the science fiction setting in comic books wasn't really approached until the early Forties by Basil Wolverton in his "Spacehawk" series in *Target Comics*, and then it was largely only because the aliens he drew, although generally intelligent, were horribly ugly, causing some young readers to write in complaining because of how scary looking they were. Being an original, Wolverton's monsters had no contemporary in the Forties for sheer weirdness.

Horror in comics in the Forties generally took the form of either the crime comics of later in the decade, or maniacs on the loose in a haunted house in which, once again, it was just the hero overcoming another obstacle rather than an attempt to tell an eerie story for its own sake. The horror, such as it was, took second place to the adventure motif. Boris Karloff's Frankenstein monster of the Thirties, despite his popularity on the screen, would not have a simulacrum until 1945 when *Frankenstein Comics* appeared. But even here the approach was designed to avoid criticism in that the monster as drawn by Dick Briefer was a humorous character, even to doing satires such as one on Superman in issue #8. This would not change until issue #18 in 1951 when it received a healthy impetus from the success of E.C. and other horror comics.

Even E.C. Comics kind of side-stepped into horror, beginning first with crime comics (*War Against Crime, Crime Patrol*) and then testing the waters by including a weird horror story to test reader reaction and then quickly following by

The corpse rising in the dead of night to seek its hideous revenge--is this the epitome of E.C. horror or was this recurring cliche merely one facet of what E.C. signified in its horror comics?


DESPITE MY PLEADING, IT TOTTERS OFF... ACROSS THE OTHER GRAVES... INTO THE COLD WIND... THE WIND THAT CARRIES BACK TO ME ONCE AGAIN THE LAUGHTER AND SCORN OF THE OTHERS...
© 1983 William M. Gaines
AND WITHIN ME THERE IS AN EMPTINESS AND A YEARNING ONCE MORE. I AM LONELY ONCE MORE.

THE WIND BLOWS SADLY ACROSS THE GNARLED AND BENT TREES AROUND ME. IT WHISPERS PAST THE COLD STONES. I LIE SILENT WITH THE EMPTINESS WITHIN ME, AND I WAIT. AND THEN, ONE NIGHT, FAR AWAY... I HEAR IT. THE SCREAMING...
YAAAAAAAAAAAA
SOMETHING IS COMING TOWARD ME, DRAGGING THE SCREAMING BEHIND IT...

changing the entire direction of the magazines.

E.C.'s horror titles, *Crypt of Terror, Tales From The Crypt, Haunt of Fear* and *The Vault of Horror* have long been regarded as the epitome of horror comics and have been written about and extensively examined for over two decades. This is not because they published the *only* good horror stories ever to appear in comics, but rather because they *sustained* a quality output. They have their share of clunkers and formula stories, as is evidenced from sitting down and reading the Russ Cochran *Tales From The Crypt* collection. But what makes them effective to this day is that besides the "guess who the werewolf and/or vampire is" stories, they also used the horror comic to do some pretty weird ideas. *Tales From The Crypt #35* has the classic "Midnight Mess!" about a vampire restaurant. The concept is humorous on the surface and this isn't ignored especially when the unlucky human patron mistakes a glass of blood for tomato juice. Things get even more wild when his sister ticks off the items on the menu which include "French-Fried Scabs...Blood Sherbet," and Harold gets a positively ill look on his face. It's tongue-in-cheek horror but the ambience created by Joe Orlando's top-notch artwork allows the story to operate on two levels, despite the comic/horror final panel in which a tap has been inserted in his jugular vein. When this story was adapted in the movie *Vault of Horror*, the American distributing company apparently failed to see the wild absurdity of the situation and timidly presented the audience with a climax done in freeze-frame instead of continuous action, which actually told the climax in something akin to a comic book form. I've been told, though, that this was unique to the American release print and that the movie wasn't made that way.

The horror of science gone awry was a favorite E.C. ploy and was no better employed than in "The Rover Boys" in *Tales From The Crypt #37*. Here a doctor gets revenge (on the medical board that revoked his license) by transplanting their brains into the bodies of dogs. Although credibility is really stretched when the dogs put his brain into a horse, it all remains weirdly effective through the use of Graham Ingles fine art. Graham Ingles has been called the finest horror comics artist who ever lived, and with good reason.

E.C. recognized the importance of story complementing art, and although it was impossible to be entirely successful at this when a completely new short story had to be concocted by them on a daily basis, they certainly tried. one of their most effective horror stories employs their much abused revenge motif in a startling and poignant manner. "Shadow of Death" in TftC #39 shows that effective horror can just hinge on one weird idea. In this case it's the concept of a shadow coming to life and seeking revenge. Ingles mastery of characterization was never better than in his portrayal here of a crippled newsdealer victimized by an unscrupulous competitor. The panels in which the old man's shadow rises up and walks, a feat which is impossible for the old man himself to duplicate, are amazing to view. Described with the barest minimum of captions, the shadow possesses both mannerisms and expression, even to a look of joy in the silhouette when it appropriates the shadows of a shovel and an axe. I have not seen anything like this before or since and in those seven pages it takes advantage of the comic strip form in ways which demonstrate an absolute superiority over the printed page. Even Stephen King at his best could not evoke the same response as those shadows rendered by Graham Ingels do. They speak volumes and seem to genuinely move of their own

accord, capturing the close union to cinema which comics has always possessed, although which generally exists only as an untapped potential.

Stephen King himself acknowledges the influence of E.C. on his emerging psyche in the book *Danse Macabre*:

"As a kid, I cut my teeth on William B. *(sic)* Gaines's horror comics—*Weird Science, Tales from the Crypt, Tales from the Vault (sic)* plus all the Gaines imitators (but like a good Elvis record, the Gaines magazines were often imitated, never duplicated). These horror comics of the fifties still sum up for me the epitome of horror, that emotion of fear that underlies terror, an emotion which is slightly less fine, because it is not entirely of the mind. Horror also invites a physical reaction by showing us something which is physically wrong.

"one typical E.C. screamer goes like this: The hero's wife and her boyfriend determine to do away with the hero so they can run away together and get married. In almost all the weird comics of the '50s, the women are seen as slightly overripe, enticingly fleshy and sexual, but ultimately evil: castrating murdering bitches who, like the trapdoor spider, feel an almost instinctual need to follow intercourse with cannibalism. These two heels, who might have stepped whole and breathing from a James M.Cain novel, take the poor slob of a husband for a ride and the boyfriend puts a bullet between the eyes. They wire a cement block to the corpse's leg and toss him over a bridge into a river.

"Two or three weeks later, our hero, a living corpse, emerges from the river, rotted and eaten by The fish. He shambles back after wifey and her friend . . . and not to invite them back to his place for a few drinks, either, one feels. One piece of dialogue from this story which I've never forgotten is, 'I am coming, Marie, but I have to come slowly . . . because little pieces of me keep falling off . . . .'

"In 'The Monkey's Paw,' the imagination alone is stimulated. The reader does the job himself. In the horror comics (as well as the horror pulps of the years 1930-1955), the viscera are also engaged.

As we have already pointed out, the old man in 'The Monkey's Paw' is able to wish the dreadful apparition away before his frenzied wife can get the door open. In *Tales from the Crypt*, the Thing from Beyond the Grave is still there when the door is thrown wide, big as life and twice as ugly."

pages 34-35

It has been remarked elsewhere that King is able to show the reader horror "up close" and still have it be very effective. This has more to do with King's own talents and abilities in the use of language than anything else, but it cannot be doubted tha E.C. showed the very young Stephen King that showing horror up close was a fun thing to do, and was very effective when done well.

Oddly enough, it was towards the end of the existence of E.C.'s horror comics that they really began indulging in pushing the horror right in the reader's face. "Foul Play" is the generally quoted example of E.C. horror, but even this, with its repetition of the revenge motif, is a very extreme example of horror shoved in the reader's face. Dismemberment was employed in several E.C. stories, but it wasn't as common as the casual use of it in "Foul Play" might lead one to believe. They seemed to try and catch up though towards the end as TftCrypt #38 uses it in two stories in the same issue; in "Tight Grip" and "Last Laugh." this was a period when new writers had come in to pick up the slack for Gaines and Feldstein who realized that they had been falling into formulas and wanted to have new perspectives in the writing. In fact, *Tales from the Crypt* #38, from late '53, is easily one of the five most violent comics E.C. ever published as this one issue features a graphic portrayal of a dismembered body, a man crushed to death by a strange shrinking trunk which squeezes all of his flesh out through bullet holes he'd fired in the sides of the trunk, and even a story by Reed Crandall in which a man pulls all of the skin from his wife's face leaving the raw flesh exposed beneath in one of E.C.'s more shocking "O'Henry" style endings. This isn't even counting some of the other bizarre things in the issue, such as feeding a man capsules filled with fish hooks and throwing hunks of horse-meat wrapped in children's clothes onto railroad tracks. If one gathered all of the other extreme horror stories E.C. published and put them under one cover, they would not surpass what TftC #38 did as a standard issue. Whereas other E.C.'s tried different kinds of horror throughout an issue, all of the writers in this one went right for the viscera and gave us an issue which was no more representative of what E.C. horror was than "Foul Play" is. I don't think a person can help but be slightly warped by reading this particular issue. (I know I was.) It has a peculiar attraction, though. We can enjoy the different kinds of horror E.C. did, including the subtle and the just plain weird, but it's stories such as these that get the biggest raction from a reader. We *want* to be jolted by a good horror story, and these play upon raw nerve endings with greater effect,and deep down inside we want to touched moved by what we read, but it takes far more skill to do this in subtle ways, and we often fail to distinguish between the final result. These stories jolt the reader with *horror*, as opposed to *terror*. Boris Karloff quite adequately

differentiated between the two by saying that terror frightens us while horror revolts us. The difference between the two being the difference between an unsettled mind and an unsettled stomach. Still we cannot help but feel an ambivalent attraction to the repulsive just out of sheer fascination over the fact that it could even exist. When fans get together and talk about favorite E.C. stories, is "Shadow of Death" ever mentioned instead of "Foul Play"?

To my mind, as strange and remarkable as the twisted E.C. horror story is, it isn't the epitome of horror that Stephen King was mentioning about E.C. earlier. It certainly sticks in the mind and tumbles from the tongue first when the word E.C. is mentioned, but when we sit back and think a minute, there are others which come to mind which exemplify what E.C. did with the horror comic form much more than the anatomy stories do.

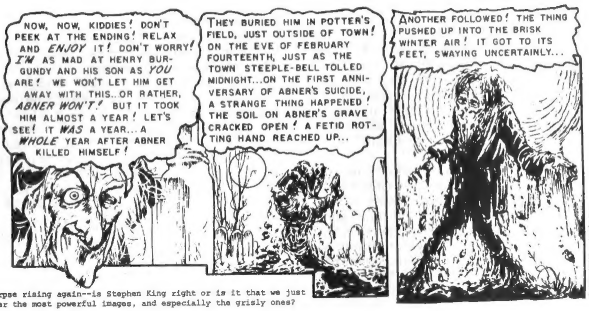
A more typical issue of an E.C. horror comic, certainly more typical than TftC #38 could ever hope to be, is *Vault of Horror* #33. The lead story, "Together They Lie," is a variation on exactly the kind of story which Stephen King described in the *Danse Macabre* excerpt in that a man returns from the grave to revenge himself on those who wronged him. "A Slight Case of Murder" is more in line with the inventiveness which E.C. intrroduced into horror comics. It's in the same vein as a few others, as regards the denouement, but we don't know that because the plot is totally different from the others which employ the birth defect angle. What makes these particular kinds of stories interesting is that each is unique. "The Basket" (*Haunt of Fear* #9) reveals a

INDEED... A TWO-HEADED VINCENT STANDS IN THE DOORWAY CONFRONTING THE MEN...
WHAT DO YOU MEN WANT?
PLEASE! FOR GOD'S SAKE! KILL US! KILL US! I CAN'T FIGHT HIM ANY LONGER!
© 1981 William M. Gaines

man born with two heads. "About Face" (*Haunt of Fear* #27) is about a girl born with two different faces on opposite sides of her head. "Chess-mate" (*Haunt of Fear* #22) and "My Brother's Keeper" (*Shock Suspense* #16) are extreme variations on the Siamese twin defect. In "A Slight Case of Murder" here in VoH #33, the birth defect is such that a man's body is horribly small and stunted while his head has developed normally, requiring the man to employ a robot body which he somehow manages to keep everyone else from noticing as being what it is. It's a bit far-fetched but it adds an imaginative touch to the revelation of the locked room murders in this story, and George Evans's art is perfectly suited to achieving the small town atmosphere. "Strung Along!"drawn by Graham Ingles is another revenge motif except this time it's a dying puppeteer's marionettes who inexplicably do the dirty work to make the old man's dying moments happy ones.

I've saved my evaluation of the second story of the issue for last because it's one of those landmark E.C. stories which really established them as streching out for the really different. "Let The Punishment Fit The Crime!" is drawn by Jack Davis, and his cartoon realism adds to the deceptive atmosphere of the story. It has been said that when E.C. began adapting Bradbury that Feldstein became strongly influenced by that type of story and style of writing. It's evident here if only as a tip-of-the-hat inspiration. This story, a crime-suspense story in actuality, shows how that type of story can move very comfortably into the realm of horror when approached in just the right way. There isn't a single fantastic element in this story and that in itself makes it more frightening because it demonstrates the horrible possibilities present in the human mind, and that ideas in and of themselves are not dangerous but rather it's who gets ahold of them an how they interpret them. This is the famous E.C. story about a group of children who are fascinated with death and dying, even to buying newspapers which carry accounts of execution. The story develops as we see the children bearing a coffin in a mock funeral.

'WHY, JUST T'OTHER DAY THEY ALL STOPPED DOWN AT MY STORE AND THEN ONE OF 'EM SAW THEM HEADLINES...YOU KNOW...'
LOOK! 'KILLER EXECUTED. DIES IN CHAIR!'
SEE! LET'S BUY A COPY! I GOT A PENNY..
© 1981 William M. Gaines


NOW, NOW, KIDDIES! DON'T PEEK AT THE ENDING! RELAX AND ENJOY IT! DON'T WORRY! I'M AS MAD AT HENRY BURGUNDY AND HIS SON AS YOU ARE! WE WON'T LET HIM GET AWAY WITH THIS..OR RATHER, ABNER WON'T! BUT IT TOOK HIM ALMOST A YEAR! LET'S SEE! IT WAS A YEAR...A WHOLE YEAR AFTER ABNER KILLED HIMSELF!
THEY BURIED HIM IN POTTER'S FIELD, JUST OUTSIDE OF TOWN! ON THE EVE OF FEBRUARY FOURTEENTH, JUST AS THE TOWN STEEPLE-BELL TOLLED MIDNIGHT...ON THE FIRST ANNIVERSARY OF ABNER'S SUICIDE, A STRANGE THING HAPPENED! THE SOIL ON ABNER'S GRAVE CRACKED OPEN! A FETID ROTTING HAND REACHED UP...
ANOTHER FOLLOWED! THE THING PUSHED UP INTO THE BRISK WINTER AIR! IT GOT TO ITS FEET, SWAYING UNCERTAINLY...
© 1981 William M. Gaines

The corpse rising again--is Stephen King right or is it that we just remember the most powerful images, and especially the grisly ones?

Discussion among the townspeople slowly unravels the story of the morbid children and how they learned about electrocution and that death was the penalty for kidnapping. In the concluding panel, as the children stand over the grave they've just filled in, the people discover that a child is missing, and he had become an enemy of the morbid kids by stealing a little girl's doll and refusing to return it. The tension reaches its climax in the final panel as the people discover this fact while in the background the children stand around the grave, saying some words over the grave of the departed. There is not one moment of violence anywhere in the story, and yet the first time I read it I was just as startled by the revelation as I was by the more grotesque presentations in *Tales from the Crypt* #38. "Let The Punishment Fit The Crime!" is far more in keeping with what the image of an E.C. horror story conjures up for me than a mouldering corpse careening homeward.

"The High Cost of Dying" in *Haunt of Fear* #21 is another example of a horror story which depends on the human element. Drawn by Reed Crandall, it evokes emotion and atmosphere without a single violent act, but depends instead on the writing and strength of the concept. How often is this story of a poor man trying to obtain money for his wife's burial and his children's meals brought up? Again, it's a crime-suspense story, but the writing, the evocative atmosphere of 1867 Paris, and the incredible art of Reed Crandall (perhaps his finest single strip at E.C.), bring it the grim and gritty reality of the horror story so that it overshadows in effect the other three stories in the issue.

In yet another departure from the fantastic, "Country Clubbing!" in *Haunt of Fear* #23 showed another tack that could be taken in the horror story. Jack Davis was never more suited for a story than he was in this one which ends on a humorous punchline wherein the joke is on not only the reader but on the story's main character. Here we see a tense chase through a swamp as a convict wrestles alligators and is bitten by a snake and more only to have the hulking gargantua pursuing him finally catch up and return a club he left at the scene of an attack. The ending is totally unexpected and shows an inventive use of the O'Henry style ending which is inspired rather than forced.

When E.C. ripped off Bradbury and made good by legally adapting a whole pacel of his yarns, they gave their writers something to aim at in the horror books as well as the science fiction titles.

"The Handler," in *Tales from the Crypt* #36 reads as if it were written *specifically* for E.C., but it is actually from the late Forties. With its bizarre sense of gallows humor the similarities in approach between this and many stories Gaines and Feldstein did write showed that they at least tried to use their imaginations in concocting their short thrillers, unlike the horror books their competitors were doing.

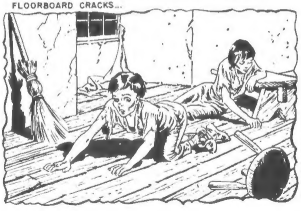
"The Lake," in *Vault of Horror* #31, was drawn by Joe Orlando and showed the concentration of attention on personality and emotional content which was present in E.C.'s best stories. The element of the fantastic is handled just right and predicted the more quiet horror of *The Twilight Zone* several years later.

No, "Foul Play" does not epitomize E.C. It's one facet, and just a very small one. E.C. developed the horror story in comics in ways it had never been approached before, and only occasionally thereafter was it equalled.

"The High Cost Of Dying!"--a tour de force of imagery and emotion which depended for its effectiveness on Reed Crandall's powerful visuals, and a story which drew the reader into its emotional pattern in a positive way that enabled us to believe in the protagonist as a genuine human being.

HIS NAME IS HENRI COURBET. HE STOPS NOW, RESTING... WIPING HIS WET EYES WITH THE BACK OF HIS HUGE HAND. HE TURNS AND GLANCES BEHIND HIM... AT THE CART... AT THE BODY LYING UPON IT, WRAPPED IN BURLAP, LYING STILL AND SILENT AND NEVERMORE TO MOVE OR LAUGH OR TALK OR CRY, AS NOW HENRY IS CRYING...

HENRI STARES DOWN AT THE RIVER. HE THINKS OF THE MEDICAL STUDENTS...GATHERED AROUND THE BODY.. THEIR SHINING SCALPELS IN THEIR UPRAISED HANDS... THEIR GRINNING FACES...

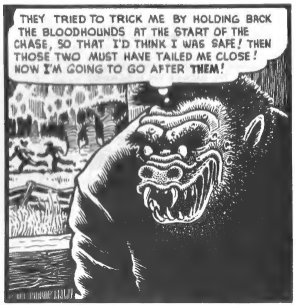

AND THEN HE THINKS OF THE CHILDREN... MARIE AND PIERRE... THEIR BLOATED STOMACHS CRYING FOR FOOD... THEIR BONY FINGERS SEARCHING FOR CRUMBS IN THE FLOORBOARD CRACKS...
© 1981 William M. Gaines

E.C.'s parting gift to the horror comics genre was *Adult Tales of Terror Illustrated* in which some of their more interesting stories were presented with new illustrations in a text heavy format. Although an interesting idea, the weight was on the writing, and despite the large number of illustrations they weren't as fluid in that format as a normal comic book page was. Even Graham Ingles version of "The Basket" just didn't capture the story with the depth that Jack Davis had back in *Haunt of Fear* #9. It was an experiment ahead of its time, but it was certainly an interesting idea and may have broken new ground if given more time.

E.C.'s science fiction books more often than not were also very much science fiction horror stories, and they broke ground in that area as well. But I'd like to stay with the more traditional concept of horror, that being stories which are largely contemporaneous. A whole detailed article could be done just analyzing E.C.'s gifts to the science fiction terror tale, but that strays from where I want to go right now.

Was there anything of note being done in horror comics at the same time E.C. was blazing trails? For the most part, no. Some fans may revel in the grotesque cover art, etc., which was abundant in this period, but this hardly advanced the form.

Basil Wolverton did a number of noteable science fiction and horror stories in the early fifties and belonged at E.C. if any artist ever did. The fact that he didn't live anywhere near New York apparently prevented his being a regular, but his stories for minor publishers in the Fifties often enhanced otherwise forgettable issues. "Swamp Monster," in *Weird Mysteries* #5 (June, 1953) is a


THEY TRIED TO TRICK ME BY HOLDING BACK THE BLOODHOUNDS AT THE START OF THE CHASE, SO THAT I'D THINK I WAS SAFE! THEN THOSE TWO MUST HAVE TAILED ME CLOSE! NOW I'M GOING TO GO AFTER THEM!

genuinely *weird* horror story, doing almost entirely with concept and image what E.C. would depend on writing to achieve. Virtually without exception, Wolverton's stories (which he usually wrote himself) had some science fiction ambience as he seemed less comfortable with the traditional horror approach unless he could introduce some fantastic element to allow his imagination and his art to run wild. That the other artists in his books didn't just look at his clean, detailed, over-powering images and quit the business entirely just demonstrated the thick skins many of his contemporaries had (or else their thick skulls). A detailed look at Wolverton's science fiction and horror art can be found in RBCC #143.

Steve Ditko's "Stretching Things" was a bit more grotesque than his later work for Atlas/Marvel.

Steve Ditko emerged on the scene in 1953 and began making his own contributions to horror in comics. His first published story is reputed to be "Stretching Things" in *Fantastic Fears* #5 (which was reprinted in RBCC #143 along with an article on Ditko which included many of his Fifties horror and science fiction covers). "Stretching Things" is so weird that it could have been drawn by Wolverton. Its tale of a man whose flesh becomes altogether *too* pliable and is still a lot of fun today. Told in the second person style of narrative (which is a weird approach to storytelling in any medium), it's effective and memorable, seeming like the kinds of stories he would do for Marvel just a few short years later, except that here the images are more violent and graphic while later he would aim at intensity of imagery and atmosphere under the more staid Comics Code of the late Fifties and early Sixties.

In *The Thing #12* (Feb. 1954), Ditko illustrates so bizarre a retelling of the Cinderalla fable that it's worthy of E.C. His artwork is in high form as we see Cinderella summon demons to transform her shabby clothes and create a horse and carriage. At the ball her sisters turn out to be vampires who murder any girl who catches the prince's eye, and when her powers fade at midnight, she flees home only to be murdered by her sisters (there's a nice panel here of her coach thundering through the streets in which there is a three level effect with a foreground, middleground and background). The story ends with the prince dismembering Cinderella's sisters. Excellent Ditko art, but *strange*.

Ditko's later work was a lot of weird mystery stories for Charlton and then the Atlas/Marvel monster books which went for weird imagery as opposed to violent imagery and a monster in every issue. These stories all had fantastic or science fiction elements and went pretty far afield of the traditional realms often explored by E.C. Stories were generally little morality plays or "let's outfox the monster" stories. The closest they'd come to horror were stories of puppets getting revenge or a criminal using a horror mask as a disguise and then removing it to discover that his own face had assumed the exact likeness of the mask. Most stories seemed just removed from our world, like ten or twenty years down the road. There were certainly too many monsters under foot to be today.

Jack Kirby and Don Heck were also important contributors to these issues, but giant spiders, the abominable snowman and a living sphinx do not a horror story make. They were weird in their own way but they fell into formulas even more quickly than E.C. did. I find it very difficult to classify them as horror stories as I think they fit under the umbrella of science fiction comics much more readily. Certainly we'll never see a writer of

Stephen King's calibre recalling them fondly. They were oddball books, neither fish nor fowl, but something in between.

Horror did not really return in any substantial way until Dell started their spinoff comics from *The Twilight Zone*. They followed with *Boris Karloff's Tales of Mystery* and a couple of others but the books were virtually indistinguishable from one another. These stories were generally of the weird mystery variety and only rarely indulged in out-and-out science fiction or monsters. One might almost call them conservative horror stories in that they tried almost nothing that couldn't have appeared on *The Twilight Zone* tele-series. They are not fondly recalled today because the imagery was very staid and laid back, attempting nothing unusual or overt though there were many stories drawn by Reed Crandall, George Evans and even a couple by Al Williamson. They *looked* like TV shows with very simple camera techniques and straighforward storytelling. The entire style and rhythm of this series was totally different from E.C. If the writers of these books were affected by E.C., it never showed as they explored areas which E.C. just never touched on but which were very commonplace on the *Twilight Zone* TV series. There were many stories of contact with the afterlife, ghosts reappearing in the present to aid people in some way, people stumbling on some strange oasis where people still lived after hundreds of years have passed. And rather than the O'Henry ending common to E.C. and its imitators, Dell went for the ironic ending in which the mystery is solved in a clever fashion or revealed to be other than what we thought, but never in the clanging, banging way that E.C. did. Many of the stories even had Rod Sterling drawn in doing a little epilogue.

Besides the artists already mentioned, early issues also had some interesting work by Alex Toth and Mike Sekowsky. An interesting story drawn by Toth is "The Shield of Medusa" in issue #7 (May, 1964) in which an archeological dig unearths the original shield of Perseus with the image of Medusa burned into it. This image has the uncanny power to turn those who look upon it to stone, just as the original Medusa supposedly could. The rest is a story of treachery with an interesting scene in which the archeologist's traitorous partner is fleeing in a pickup truck with the shield hanging out the window, turning all his pursuers to stone. It's an interesting little story and one of the bright spots of the early isssues.

My favorite "horror" story in the series is "They Dwell Among Us" in issue #12. Blessed with the most interesting Don Heck artwork I've ever seen, it tells the story of a young boy who possesses weird talents, and of the grandparents whom he lives with who also possess them. A bad fire nearby forces the grandparents into revealing their abilities in order to save lives, but the terrified neighbors regard the abilities as witchcraft and stone the two to death. The following day the young boy pretends to be a normal child and then when alone summons up the shades of his grandparents who explain that the superscience they possess will not be understood by mankind for centuries to come. They counsel him to hide his powers and not hate those who slew them. It's a much more effective tale than I make it seem here. The cover painting on this issue is based on this story and is one of the best the magazine ever produced.

Beginning with issue #21 it began featuring reprints combined with new material and the new stories lost the luster and mystique of the early issues.

Although only a partially successful series in comic book form, *The Twilight Zone* still featured more effort and invention in their stories, overall, than D.C. did in their so-called "mystery books." The *House of Secrets* and *House of Mystery* both began in the Fifties but presented stories which were bland and tame even on their good days. Often strange monsters appeared and by and large the books weren't a whole lot different from *Strange Adventures*. There were stories by Jack Kirby, but these looked even more like something that belonged in *Strange Adventures*. It's difficult to say that horror was explored in these books and they lean much closer to the Marvel monster books, except just sifted through the more calm approach at D.C.

Probably the most effective exploration of horror in a D.C. comic was "Nightmare" drawn by Neal Adams in *House of Mystery* #186. Written by Jack Oleck, and based on a very similar story he did for Atlas in the Fifties, it examined the borderline between fantasy and reality and has a very effective sequence in which a young girl stumbles into a weird dimension and is terrorized by bizarre monsters in a sequence designed to evoke genuine horror. It's a touching story about loss of innocence and has remained a favorite of mine for over ten years. It was later reprinted by D.C. in a *House of Mystery* tabloid.

D.C. has done so many weird yet forgettable stories that this actually worked in their favor once when they did something different and more true to life. "The Demon Within!" (*House Of Mystery* #201) is written by Joe Orlando and John Albano with art by Jim Aparo. It's a simple story of a young boy who can transform himself into a little monster which is hideous yet harmless. His

family is so embarrased by the situations which result that they take drastic action...by having a lobotomy performed on the child. The final panel is effective because anything remotely connected with reality and the pressure of social attitudes involving the fear of the different almost never intrudes on these comics, which makes a thinly disguised social commentary such as this that much more startling. This story and "Nightmare" are the only two D.C. mystery stories (they object strenuously to being called "horror") I've read in the past ten years that I still remember today while others have faded completely. Fans will also appreciate having *House Of Mystery* #201 as it features a striking Mike Kaluta cover based on this very story.

Other D.C. mystery books have done a variety of horror stories without ever being particularly evocative, with many of them being just warmed over E.C., and obviously so.

"The Vegetable Garden!" in *House Of Secrets* #135 borrows some of the strains of E.C.'s "Poetic Justice" (*Haunt of Fear* #12) except the main character is an old woman instead of an old man. Her sneaky relatives break her down by telling people that she's "unstable" so that the neighborhood children won't visit her, and then her pet is mysteriously killed. Borrowing from a different E.C. story, she kills her hateful nephew, dismembers him (discreetly off-stage) and buries him in the garden with symbols of human limbs labeling the different rows. It's not one of Michael Fleisher's more memorable efforts.

Wally Wood has done a few stories for D.C. but these generally stand out because while the story may only be adequate, Wood visualizes it to stunning effect. One example is "The Monster", in *House of Secrets* #96. The script by Jack Oleck tells of a young boy who wakes up in the hospital to find himself surrounded by monsters wearing hospital uniforms. He flees but is found and returned. A doctor finally gets through to the boy and makes him see the truth; that he's the monster and everyone else actually looks normal. The images are from the boy's perspective so everyone except him looks horrible throughout the story (some of the most bizarre creatures Wood has drawn in the past 25 years) until the end where the transition scene of the doctor and nurse in shadows seems to borrow from *The Twilight Zone* episode "Eye of the Beholder." It's formula.

The glimmers of interest in the D.C. "Mystery" books have grown dimmer and dimmer in recent years until they have become mostly, as artist Steve Bissette puts it, "so much predigested soup." Blandness has become a byword so that a series is running in one of the titles about a character who is both a vampire *and* a werewolf. (His origin being one of the more amusing horror stories I've read, but the amusement wasn't intentional on D.C.'s part).

Only rarely does something of even mild interest like "Old Haunts" in *House Of Mystery* #294 (July 1981) crop up. Written by Bruce Jones and drawn by talented new-comer Tom Yeates, it's a ghost story that keeps you guessing and was at least interesting.

D.C.'s most effective horror has been done almost exclusively by Neal Adams, and most of those involved the Batman. There's the Man-Bat series in *Detective Comics* #400, 402 and 407. Then in *Detective* #410 is "A Vow From The Grave" which is a weird tale of circus freaks, mysterious murders, courage and love. Written by Denny O'Neil, it opens in a raging thunderstorm and is uphill all the way. Another O'Neil/Adams weird adventure is "Red Water Crimson Death" in *The Brave & The Bold* #93 which has strange visions and a thunderstorm at sea. Len Wein teamed with Adams for "Moon of the Wolf" in *Batman* #255 which features a werewolf in a good story which climaxes in...a thunderstorm. Adams did other noteable horror at D.C. such as *Phantom Stranger* #4, which only has a little thunderstorm.

D.C.'s supreme exercise in horror was, of course, the Len Wein and Berni Wrightson *Swamp Thing*. Their explorations of different themes in each issue, from the Frankenstein monster to witches to werewolves is more than familiar to everyone reading this, either from other explorations of it elsewhere or in the reprint volumes D.C. has issued over the past couple of years. If you haven't seen it, don't waste any time obtaining it. I recommend the original books if you're at all picky as the reproduction in the reprint volumes if too often only fair at best.

The only real *sustained* horror since E.C. which really tried to do interesting and intelligent (if not necessarily profound) things in the comic form was Warren. Now, I'm not talking about the recent Warrens and their forays into sadism and related neighborhoods, but the 1964 Warrens under editor Archie Goodwin. Much of the material in these early issues was clearly a labor of love by many of those involved as much of the E.C. staff was regrouped so that we had Reed Crandall, Al Williamson, Roy Krenkel, Joe Orlando, John Severin, Wally Wood, Angelo Torres and even Frank Frazetta, who did not only covers and a terrific one-page "Creepy's Loathesome Lore" in #2, but a six page strip in *Creepy* #1 which still has the fans howling. Non-E.C. talent like Gray Morrow and Steve Ditko just helped to round things out. Not since E.C. did one company have so much heavyweight talent under one roof, but it was doomed to last only about three years, and when the dust settled only

Crandall, Severin and Wood remained to do sporadic work for the magazines *Creepy*, *Eerie* and later *Vampirella*.

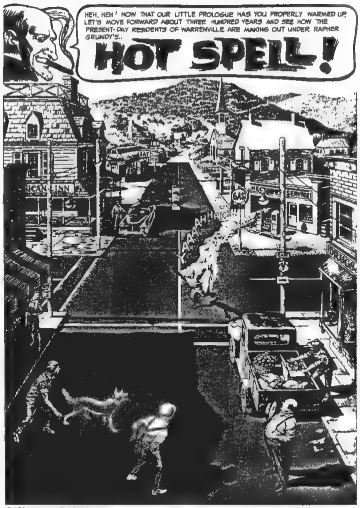
While it lasted, though, it seemed like happy days were here again. Even Jack Davis turned up in *Creepy* #3 for a "Creepy's Loathesome Lore."

Unlike E.C., the writing in these early issues was brisk and to the point, generally relying on pictures and dialogue and sometimes never using captions except in the adaptations of Edgar Allan Poe and Eando Binder.

Creepy #3, in a story by Arthur Porges with art by Joe Orlando, that E.C. cliche favored by Stephen King turned up in that a man murdered by his wife returns from the grave to seek revenge, but in a twist never even employed by E.C., the corpse greets his wife with a great big kiss.

Adaptations of classics were common in these early issues, and one of the best was Goodwin's adaptation of Ambrose Bierce's "The Damned Thing!" well rendered by Gray Morrow. As with the Poe adaptations, Goodwin added a scene to the end which actually amplified the effectiveness of the story as Bierce's original has no climax and just stops, but Goodwin fixed that quite well.

Among the many entertaining werewolf and vampire on the loose stories, there were also some more memorable tales, such as "Hot Spell" in *Creepy* #7. Written by Archie Goodwin and drawn by Reed Crandall, it captures the small town atmosphere as well as presenting convincing characterizations of a suspicious populace. Told in a breezy fashion with, again, no captions other than on the title pages, it captures


HEH, HEH! NOW THAT OUR LITTLE PROLOGUE HAS YOU PROPERLY WARMED UP, LET'S MOVE FORWARD ABOUT THREE HUNDRED YEARS AND SEE HOW THE PRESENT-DAY RESIDENTS OF HAREMVILLE ARE MAKING OUT UNDER RAPHIER GRUNDY'S...
HOT SPELL!

©1981 Warren Publishing

ABOVE THE RING OF HIS OWN SLASHING SWORD, MARCUS HEARD THE SOUND OF THE DRUIDESS' MOCKING LAUGHTER AS HER WAND DANCED THROUGH THE AIR... THE ATTACKERS MELTED INTO A HIDEOUS NEW FORM!
FIGHT ON! FIGHT ON ONLY AS THE SPAWN OF GREAT DISPATER CAN!
JUPITER'S BLOOD! SHE PITS ME WITH GLADIATORS OF THE DAMNED!

© 1981 Warren Publishing

Several years before Marvel's CONAN, Archie Goodwin brought Sword and Sorcery fiction full blown into comics with a frenzy that Marvel's rather staid visuals seldom matched. Only in rare cases, such as John Bolton's recent Kull, have visuals appeared to pick up the lead expressed by Goodwin, Crandall, Ditko and others in the mid-Sixties.

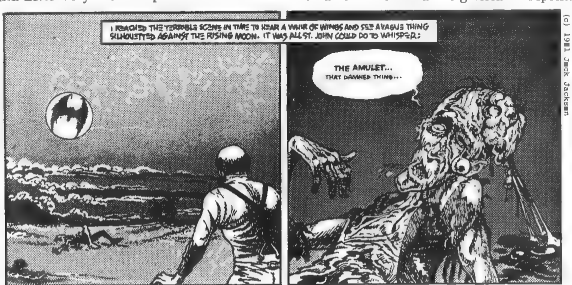
the E.C. flavor by being inspired rather than imitating. It's a supreme example of horror in the comics.

Another example of classic horror in the E.C. tradition of excellence is "The Defense Rests!" in *Eerie #7*. Written and drawn by Johnny Craig, it tells its story *only* with captions in a welcome change of pace. Craig is at the top of his form in this period piece. His talents are evident just as they were in E.C.'s declining days when he'd begun writing his own stories and was on the verge of taking over full editorship of *The Vault of Horror* when it folded. A new female ghoulunatic he was about to introduce appears in the final issue of that venerated E.C. title.

Archie Goodwin anticipated the genre far more than he has been give credit for as he is responsible for expanding comics into the clear and undisguised genre of Sword & Sorcery. Since much S&S is horror and weird fantasy anyway, the form fit neatly into the magazine. It began with "Dark Kingdom!" in *Creepy #9* and continued with "Cave Of the Druids" in *Eerie #6*, "Demon Sword" in *Eerie #8*. "Warrior of Death" in *Eerie #10* (the last two being some of Steve Ditko's finest work) and "Where Sorcery Lives," again by Ditko, in *Creepy #14*. Ditko *again* returned with a fine S&S tale in "City Of Doom" in *Creepy #15*. Many of these were very simple hero versus villain tales by today's standards, but nothing like these stories had been done in comics before. The Howard boom in paperbacks was barely beginning when these stories launched into the genre full steam, anticipating by five years the interest which would finally show up in the color comics (albeit a bit gingerly) just prior to the first issue of Marvel's *Conan* in 1970. These stories in *Creepy* and *Eerie* very much captured the flavor of Howard and his imitators in *Weird Tales*. So although many substantive things were done in the Warren magazines from 1964-67, the one genuine difference was the introduction of S&S, which perhaps to a sword-weary readership today doesn't sound like that big a deal. But go back and reread those stories. However simplistic they may be, the drive and energy of the Howard style of S&S shines through and it's clear that the creators of those strips had real enthusiasm for what they were doing.

It wouldn't be fair to say that Warren degenerated into nothingness when Goodwin left and his talented friends followed, but for several years only very random examples of quality were evident, the most sustained and important moments being those couple years when Richard Corben was doing a lot of work for Warren, and Wrightson's appearances, including his adaptation of H.P. Lovecraft's "Cool Air" (*Eerie #62*, reprinted in the all-Wrightson reprint issue of *Creepy #113*). This was not the first adaptation of "Cool Air," as even Wrightson is well aware as his artistic inspiration, Graham Ingles, drew E.C.'s uncredited adaptation titled "Baby...It's Cold Inside!" in *Vault Of Horror #17* (1951). The influence of Ingels on Wrightson is further evident in "Jenifer" (*Creepy #63*) as the title character's horrible facial features are copied directly from the final panel of "About Face" in *The Haunt of Fear #27*. The comparison is more than just striking but is an honorable homage to one of the true greats of horror comics.

Marvel's B&W horror magazines had their moments, but precious few of them. Neal Adams' origin of Dracula in the second issue of that magazine is a high point, but not much else remains other than significant reprints from


REVEALED THE TERRIBLE SCENE IN TIME TO HEAR A WAVE OF WINGS AND SEE A HUGE THING SILHOUETTED AGAINST THE RISING MOON. IT WAS ALL ST. JOHN COULD DO TO WHISPER:
THE AMULET... THAT DAMNED THING...
(c) 1981 Jack Jackson

Jack Jackson's eloquent adaptation of Lovecraft's "The Hound" in SKULL #4 translated H.P.L.'s images a bit explicitly, but nonetheless with daring accuracy and invention. Jackson took this often overlooked Lovecraft story and showed exactly why H.P.L. achieved such a hold on the literature of horror. It's an absolutely classic example of horror in comics advancing the form.

Marvel's color comics into B&W, such as "At The Stroke of Midnight!" in *Vampire Tales* #2 (Oct. 1973) and Al Williamson's "The Monster in the Mist" in *Monsters Unleashed* #7. The rest was just rehashes of things we'd seen before and which were already very tiresome in the Warren magazines.

The Skywald titles like *Psycho* had a handful of interesting stories by Ralph Reese and Mike Kaluta but were otherwise incredibly forgettable. *Psycho* #10 is memorable only for a three page article on H.P. Lovecraft with accompanying photos by Alan Hewetson taken in Providence, Rhode Island, where Lovecraft lived and died.

Probably the strangest additions to the realm of horror comics are the underground comics. Not only do they often openly acknowledge their influence from E.C., but often cling to it rabidly, pursuing the most violent and extreme elements which the line dabbled in, only embracing these concepts to the open exclusion of the more subtle and thoughtful approach which E.C. also brought to the horror comic. E.C. science fiction imitations abound in the ug's, but mixed in with nudity, blatant sex, violent death and dismemberment as if these elements were somehow logical extensions of the E.C. phenomenon.

If the undergrounds loved E.C., they idolized Lovecraft and extended him the same courtesies they had E.C., although with greater restraint, almost as if they feared to trample this ground underfoot. They seemed to sense the tangible *power* which lurked in Lovecraft and were less willing to tamper with it. *Skull* #'s 4 and 5 were special Lovecraft issues and featured adaptations of "The Hound" by Jaxon (a supreme achievement), a bizarre story by Charles Dallas featuring monsters dismembering people and then each other, "Cool Air" by M.C.S., "Pickman's Model" drawn by Herb Arnold, "The Rats In The Walls" by Richard Corben (very good but crowded into only ten pages), and "The Shadow From The Abyss" by Larry Todd which is a condensed version of Lovecraft's "The Shadow Out of Time." Only Jaxon's adaptation takes full advantage of the form while the others are inhibited by lack of space and fall back on a lot of small panels which compartmentalize Lovecraft and bleed off the strength of the pieces involved. Jaxon succeeds in capturing the vistas of unplumbed mystery and horror and serves them up for the reader's gaping eyes to behold. He considers this story a true labor of love and craft and we've acquired permission to reprint it in a special Lovecraft/horror issue in the works, as it has been out of print for quite some time, having originally appeared 9 years ago.

Larry Todd's condensation of "The Shadow Out Of Time" may have trimmed this Lovecraft tale down too much, but it was still a helluva' use of sf and horror.

(c) 1981 Larry Todd
HERE I HAD TALKED WITH THE MIND OF NUG-SOTH, A MAGICIAN OF THE DARK CONQUERORS OF 16,000 AD. AND WITH YIANG-LI, A PHILOSOPHER FROM THE CRUEL EMPIRE OF TSAN-CHAN, WHICH IS TO COME IN 5000 A.D., AND WITH THE SPIRIT OF THE AUSTRALIAN PHYSICIST NEVEL KINGSTON-BROWN, OF THE YEAR 2,518 AD.!!

This is by no means a definitive or completely in-depth piece as all of the companies and titles mentioned deserve more attention than just the rough grouping I've put them in and in the near future I'll probably return to some, like Warren, and examine them in more detail in order to put the perspective in perspective.

All of the titles discussed contributed *something* to the horror comics form, but some clearly contributed more than others. In order to see how important the contribution was, you have to view it as a whole. E.C. only existed for about six years, but those six years are all important.

Warren has been around for fifteen years, but only a small percentage of that fifteen years begs preserving. The same is true of the D.C. mystery books and the smaller companies. How many horror comics outside of E.C. are worth having a five year run of collected in oversized hardcovers?

Horror comics today seem to be in a holding pattern, being represented only loosely by Pacific and timidly by D.C. Marvel is planning to publish adaptations of some Steve King short stories, but other than that one shot they no longer have any horror comics. Is it any wonder the E.C. reprints are so popular? In this era of slam-bang science fiction, it seems that only the popularity of Stephen King, a child of E.C., may once more bring life to horror comics.

A SMALL MIDWESTERN TOWN... A GROUP OF RESTLESS YOUNG MEN... A BEAUTIFUL YOUNG CORPSE... AN UNSUSPECTING VICTIM... THESE ARE THE INGREDIENTS FOR A CRUEL PRACTICAL JOKE...

OH, YES-- ADD ONE OTHER INGREDIENT...

A DEAD RINGER

STORY BY BOB STINE
ART BY SRBISSETTE

OUR STORY BEGINS WHERE MANY LIVELY TALES BEGIN-- IN A FUNERAL PARLOR! THE NIGHT WATCHMAN-- WHO DOES DOUBLE-DUTY AS THE TOWN FOOL-- DISCOVERS THAT A NEW CORPSE HAS CAUSED SOME EXCITEMENT IN THE SLEEPY LITTLE TOWN...

HEY, SHIKEY-- HEARD YOU GOT A NEW ARRIVAL!

WOW! SHE'S SOME LOOKER! WHO IS SHE?

A STRANGER! NO ONE EVER SAW HER BEFORE! SHERIFF FOUND HER-- DEAD, BEHIND THE BUS STATION!

NOW GET OUTA HERE, YOU BUMS! YOU GOT NO BUSINESS IN HERE GAWKIN' AT CORPSES! I GOT A JOB TO DO!

OUTSIDE, THE BORED YOUNG MEN HATCH A PLOT TO DO A JOB ON SHIKEY...

YOU KNOW WHO THAT CORPSE LOOKS LIKE? THE SHERIFF'S COUSIN, ANN McCALL!

HEY, YOU'RE RIGHT! SHE'S A DEAD RINGER FOR ANN!

HAW! HAW! HAW! GET IT? A DEAD RINGER!

LISTEN, GUYS-- I'VE GOT AN IDEA! HOW'D YOU LIKE TO SEE SHIKEY LEAP ABOUT 50 FEET IN THE AIR, AND THEN RUN NON-STOP TO THE NEXT COUNTY?

SOUNDS LIKE FUN TO ME! SHIKEY'S GOTTEN TOO BIG FOR HIS BRITCHES ANYHOW! THROWIN' US OUT LIKE THAT!

WELL, FOLLOW ME! WE'RE GOIN' TO SEE ANN McCALL!

"A Dead Ringer" © 1980 Scholastic Magazines, Inc. from WEIRD WORLDS #6; reprinted with permission of the publishers.

ANN McCALL IS USED TO THE BOYS' JOKES, BUT THIS ONE GOES A BIT TOO FAR...
SO WHAT IF I LOOK JUST LIKE THAT CORPSE? I'M NOT CLIMBIN' IN NO CASKET JUST FOR A JOKE!
COME ON, ANN-- SHIKEY'S BEEN ASKIN' FOR IT! IT'LL BE A REAL HOOT!
ALL YOU GOTTA DO IS PUT ON A LITTLE WHITE MAKE-UP SO YOU'LL LOOK LIKE A CORPSE!
MOVE THE CORPSE TO A CORNER AND CLIMB INTO THE CASKET!
...THEN WHEN SHIKEY COMES BY ON HIS ROUNDS--
--YOU SIT UP SLOWLY AND PUT A HAND ON HIS SHOULDER!
HAW! HAW! HAW! CAN YOU SEE HIS FACE!
HE'LL THINK YOU'RE A VAMPIRE OR SOMETHING! HE'LL RUN FOR THE STATE BORDER!
HA HA! IT'S A PRETTY GOOD JOKE, BOYS, BUT...
WHERE ARE YOU GOING TO BE?
WE'LL STAY AWAY WHILE YOU'RE MAKING THE SWITCH SO SHIKEY WON'T GET SUSPICIOUS! THEN, AT EXACTLY MIDNIGHT WE'LL BE WATCHIN' THROUGH THE WINDOW WHEN YOU DO YOUR ACT! HAW! HAW!
ANN RELUCTANTLY AGREES, AFTER ALL, IT'S BETTER THAN SITTING HOME AND KNITTING...
OUR SCENE SWITCHES TO THE FUNERAL PARLOR... IT'S JUST ABOUT MIDNIGHT AS SHIKEY MAKES HIS ROUNDS IN THE QUIET DARKNESS... UNAWARE OF THE EAGER FACES PEERING INTO THE WINDOW...
THOSE TROUBLEMAKERS AREN'T AROUND TONIGHT, MAYBE I'LL CATCH A LITTLE SHUT EYE!
MY, OH MY- SUCH A PRETTY YOUNG WOMAN... AND NO ONE TO CLAIM HER... TSK, TSK.

SHIKEY'S THOUGHTS ARE SUDDENLY INTERRUPTED! HE FREEZES IN TERROR AS THE CORPSE SLOWLY SITS UP!
AND GRABS HIS SHOULDER!
NO! NO! HELLLP!
OUTSIDE, THE PRANKSTERS ARE AN APPRECIATIVE AUDIENCE...
HAW HAW HAW
SHIKEY AIN'T RUNNIN'-- HE'S FLYIN'!
ESPO'S UMBRAL HOUSE
HEY, LOOK! ANN'S CHASIN' AFTER HIM!
HAW HAW
WHAT'S SHE DOIN' THAT FOR?
A HAND GRABS A JOKESTER'S SHOULDER-- AND THE LAUGHTER SUDDENLY STOPS!
ANN!
HI, BOYS... SORRY I'M LATE!
PA CALLED AND I COULDN'T GET HIM OFF THE PHONE!
HEY, COME ON, YOU GUYS-- DON'T LOOK SO GRIM!
THERE'S STILL TIME TO MAKE THE SWITCH! IT'S EARLY!!
NO ANN-- IT'S LATER THAN YOU THINK! IN FACT IT'S THE END!

STORM-TOSSED NIGHT, BILL AND SARAH HARLAN ARE ALARMED TO SEE THEIR CAR DIE ON A DARK AND DESERTED ROAD...
OH, BILL--THIS IS TERRIBLE!! WHERE ARE WE?
DARK ST
DESERTED
I CAN JUST BARELY MAKE OUT THAT STREET SIGN...OH... WE'RE AT THE CORNER OF DARK AND DESERTED!
I HAVE A PLAN, BILL. YOU GO OUT AND HEAD BACK TOWARD TOWN ALONG THE ROAD UNTIL YOU COME TO A FARMHOUSE WHERE YOU CAN ASK FOR HELP!
PRETTY GOOD PLAN. BUT I HAVE A BETTER ONE!
WHAT'S THAT?
YOU GO OUT AND HEAD BACK TOWARDS TOWN ALONG THE ROAD UNTIL YOU COME TO A FARMHOUSE WHERE YOU CAN ASK FOR HELP!
CRUNCH
PRODUCED BY THE JOE KUBERT SCHOOL OF CARTOON ART
I'M NOT A COWARD, SARAH. I'M JUST TOO SCARED TO WALK!
OH, BILL, WE'VE ONLY BEEN MARRIED SIX WEEKS, AND NOW YOU LET ME DOWN WHEN IT COMES TO THE CRUNCH!

THAT SICKENING SOUND IS JUST THE *FIRST STEP* IN A RACE AGAINST A HORROR TOO HORRIBLE TO MENTION (BUT WE WILL ANYWAY)! SARAH AND BILL HAVE JUST BECOME THE FIRST EXTREMELY SHORT VICTIMS IN THIS RUN-DOWN EXCUSE FOR A HORROR FILM WE CALL...

ATTACK OF THE 50-FOOT JOGGERS

THE ONCE-PROUD CITY OF CLEVELAND IS TRAMPLED TO *RUBBLE* AS THE CRAZED JOGGERS HEAD EAST...

WHY CLEVELAND? WHY ALWAYS CLEVELAND?

STORY JOVIAL BOB TINE

THE GREAT LAKES ARE MERE *PUDDLES* TO THE RAMPAGING RUNNERS...

HEY- GREAT SHOES! ARE THOSE ADIDAS?

IN A QUIET PARK OUTSIDE PHILADELPHIA, *SCOTT TOWLE*, WELL-KNOWN YOUNG SCIENTIST, IS JOGGING WITH A FRIEND...

NOW THAT I JOG 62 MILES A DAY, I FEEL GREAT, SCOTT!

OF COURSE, I LOST MY JOB AND MY WIFE LEFT ME-- BUT I FEEL SO *HEALTHY!*

SQUASH

HEY- CAN'T YOU READ?

WE'VE GOT TO DO SOMETHING!

HUNDREDS OF CRAZED JOGGERS ARE RUNNING THROUGH THE PARK!

SO WHAT ELSE IS NEW?

THE *F.B.I.* CALLS FROM WASHINGTON...

HELLO, SCOTT TOWLE?

WHAT A COINCIDENCE! MY NAME'S SCOTT TOWLE, TOO!

WE NEED YOUR HELP! COME TO WASHINGTON AT ONCE!

: GOODNESS YOU'VE
ED, TOWLE! WE'VE
EVERYTHING TO
ESE GIANT JOGGERS!
TS DON'T DO A THING!
D ATOMIC BOMBS! WE
UT UP A GIANT RED
IGHT-- BUT THEY
IGHT THROUGH IT!
ELL... I HAVE
ETHING HERE IN
BAG THAT JUST
HT STOP THEM!
WHAT
IS IT?
IT'S A GIANT
ATHLETE'S
FOOT
FUNGUS!
YECCH!
GAG!
ULP!!
TOO
DISGUSTING!
"WHERE DID IT
COME FROM,
TOWLE AS
"WHY
OUR SCIENTISTS
SAY THESE MONSTERS
WERE CAUSED BY AN
IMBALANCE OF NATURE!
TOO MANY HEALTH
FOOD STORES! TOO
MANY ORGANICALLY
GROWN VEGETABLES!
NOT ENOUGH
CHEMICALS IN
THEIR DIET!
HOW
AWFUL!
OW THEY
UNNING WILD,
LING OUR
AND OUR
TIES!
AND WHAT'S
WORSE IS --
THEY (SHUDDER)
DON'T WEAR ANY
DEODERANT!
REVOLTING!
THEY MUST BE
STOPPED! YOU'VE
GIVEN ME AN
IDEA!
ITH THE FULL
COOPERATION OF THE
U.S. GOVERNMENT, A
TEAM OF CONSTRUCTION
WORKERS FEVERISHLY
GOES TO WORK ON A
60-STORY STRUCTURE!
HOURS LATER...
IT'S
FINISHED!
MINUTES, THE GIANT JOGGERS HAVE STAMPEDED INTO
LDING, AND THE DOOR IS LOCKED - FOREVER!
RILLIANT,
LE! BRILLIANT!
KNEW JOGGERS
AN'T RESIST
YOGURT!
YOU'VE SAVED
THIS NATION FROM
ITS WORST PLAGUE
SINCE TONY ORLANDO
AND DAWN!
WELL... GOT
TO GET HOME
NOW, GOTTA JOG
MY 62 MILES
BEFORE WORK!
THE JOGGERS ARE
GONE NOW - OR ARE
THEY? KEEP WATCHING
THE SKIES! (AND THE
SIDEWALKS!)

NIGHT IN THE BLACK FOREST, AND A WORRIED TRAVELER SLOWLY PUSHES HIS WAY THROUGH THE DARKNESS...
SEEM TO HAVE LOST MY WAY. THE INN SHOULD HAVE BEEN A MILE BACK...
WHAT WAS THAT SOUND?
WERE-WOLF!

THAT'S THE WAY TO GET A JUMP ON THE ACTION, GANG! HOPE YOU HAVEN'T BITTEN OFF MORE THAN YOU CAN CHEW! JUST WAIT TILL YOU GET A TASTE OF...

THE VILLAGER'S VICTORY!

TEXT: JANE & BOB STINE ART: THE JOE KUBERT SCHOOL

THE THIRD WEREWOLF ATTACK THIS YEAR! HORRIBLE!
I KNOW IT'S THE WORK OF COUNT WOLFGANG! IT MUST BE HIM! ALL ALONE IN THAT DARK MANSION IN THE FOREST!
BUT WE HAVE NO PROOF. HE'S A WEREWOLF, HANS! NO PROOF!
MEANWHILE, LOCKED HIGH IN THE TOWER OF COUNT WOLFGANG'S MYSTERIOUS FOREST MANSION...
LOOK, ILSA - SOMEONE APPROACHES!
QUICK - THROW DOWN THE MESSAGE! THIS MAY BE OUR CHANCE TO ESCAPE FROM COUNT WOLF-GANG!
1

OUTSIDE, BENEATH THEIR CELL WINDOW...
HEY! WHAT'S THIS? TWO CHILDREN UP IN THE TOWER? HELD PRISONER?
I'VE GOT TO DO SOMETHING!
IT'S TRUE! COUNT WOLFGANG HAS IMPRISONED TWO CHILDREN IN HIS TOWER!
WE MUST GO AT ONCE!
BUT THE FULL MOON! WHAT IF THE COUNT—WHAT IF HE REALLY IS A WEREWOLF?
FORGETTING THEIR FEARS, THE VILLAGERS DESCEND UPON THE EVIL MANSION...
OPEN THE DOOR, WOLFGANG! OR WE'LL SMASH IT DOWN—AND YOU WITH IT!
THE DARK FIGURE OF THE COUNT APPEARS IN PUBLIC FOR THE FIRST TIME...
HOW DARE YOU TRESPASS UPON MY PROPERTY AND MY PRIVACY?
GIVE US THE CHILDREN!
NEVER!! I WARN YOU—DON'T ANGER ME! DON'T DELVE INTO MATTERS YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND! GO BACK TO YOUR HOVELS!
NOT WITHOUT THE CHILDREN!
THE ENRAGED VILLAGERS STORM THE MANSION, OVERPOWERING THE COUNT...
QUICK—SOMEONE GET UP TO THE TOWER AND FREE THOSE KIDS!
IN THE FRAY, A DROPPED TORCH SETS THE MANSION ABLAZE...
FIRE!!
THE CHILDREN! CAN WE GET THEM OUT THROUGH THE FLAMES?
2

QUICK, KIDS, FOLLOW ME! I'LL GET YOU OUT!
AT LAST!
OUT OF THE BURNING PRISON INTO THE FRESH NIGHT AIR...
CRRAAAKK
WE'RE OUT!
WE'VE MADE IT!
THE CHILDREN ARE FREE!
WE'VE WON!
WE MUST CELEBR- WAIT- LOOK!!
AS THE MOON RISES...
N-NO! NO!
OOOWOO
THE FOOLS! THE FOOLS! I WARNED THEM! YES, THEY HAVE DEFEATED ME...
OOOO
... BUT NOW THEY WILL KNOW THE BITTER TASTE OF THEIR VICTORY!
3

THREE ARTISTS: RICHARD HESCOX, DAVE STEVENS, BILL STOUT

(This was originally scheduled to run in RBCC prior to suspension of that magazine)

by Robert Strauss

In Los Angeles's Wilshire district, a few blocks from the La Drea Tar Pits, behind an opaque glass storefront, three young fantasy artists share a cluttered, high-ceilinged studio filled to overflowing with the fruit and the debris of imagination.

Dave Stevens, the thin, self-effacing creator of Pacific Comics' hit *Rocketeer* series, occupies the workspace coloset to the door. He shares the room with the wisecracking Richard Hescox, painter of movie posters and over two dozen covers for DAW fantasy and science fiction paperback books. Lurking in the two back rooms amid hundreds of art books and thousands of toy dinosaurs, an artist's bandana knotted loosely around his neck, is underground cartoonist, advertising whiz kid and film production designer William Stout. The following interviews were conducted at this studio in Octover of 1982.

RBCC: How did you come to share this studio?

WS: I used to have my studio in my home. A neighbor who did advertising work as an art director found out I was an artist and a friend of his had this studio on...

DS: Don't give the details! (Laughter)

WS: And the guy in the back had just moved out, so they were looking for an artist to share the studio. I gladly moved in for the tall ceilings and large space. After a while I took over half of the middle room. The man who used to produce *Saturday Night Live* and *The Rutles Show* used to have it and the other half belonged to a T-Shirt promoter. The front room belonged to Jack Medoff, who does sophisticated grease-crayon type cartoons. New Yorker style stuff. The t-shirt guy decided to give up his business and Jack decided to go back to New York where there was more work for his style of cartooning, so I was left with the whole place. I decided I would either find one or two people who I'd really like to rent it to or else use the front as a gallery. Fortunately, the two people I wanted to share the studio with most accepted. That was Richard and David.

RBCC: Do you often work together on projects?

DS: We bicker on the projects.

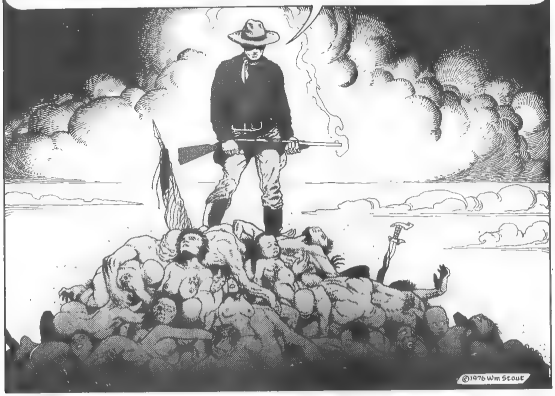
WS: We did more artwork together before we got a studio together. The only thing we do now is criticize each other's work and try to bolster each other's morale.

RBCC: What have you worked on together?

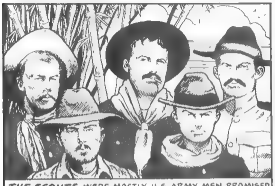
WS: Dave and I did a toy for Tomy Toys, the final

MY NAME IS THIRD LIEUTENANT... ACTUALLY, I'D PREFER **NOT** TO TELL YOU MY NAME. YOU SEE, I WAS PERSONALLY INVOLVED IN **AMERICA'S DEEPEST DISGRACE**, A SORDID SCAR ON OUR PAST YOU WON'T FIND IN YOUR HIGH SCHOOL HISTORY BOOKS. I SAW THE WHOLESALE **SLAUGHTER** OF **WOMEN** AND **MEN** — THE **MASS BUTCHERY** OF THEIR **BABIES** AND **CHILDREN**. I CONFESS TO INVOLVEMENT IN THE BIGGEST **MASS GENOCIDE** EVER COMMITTED UNTIL THE ADVENT OF **HITLER**. I TOOK PART IN THE ...

FILIPINO MASSACRE



IN **1898** WE TOOK THE PHILIPPINES FROM SPAIN AND IMMEDIATELY SET UP MILITARY CONTROL. THE AMERICAN PUBLIC WAS **OUTRAGED** AND HEAVILY OPPOSED OUR INVOLVEMENT. TO DECEIVE THE PUBLIC INTO THINKING THERE WERE FEWER U.S. ARMY PERSONNEL IN THE PHILIPPINES THAN IN ACTUALITY, THE **PHILIPPINE SCOUTS** WERE ESTABLISHED...



THE SCOUTS WERE MOSTLY U.S. ARMY MEN PROMISED RAPID RANK ADVANCES IF THEY WOULD "QUIT" THE ARMY TO JOIN THIS PHILIPPINE OUTFIT. OF COURSE, WHEN THEY "RETURNED" TO THE ARMY THEY KEPT THEIR NEW RANK.

THE MOROS WERE THE FIERCE, PROUD RULING TRIBE OF THE PHILIPPINES. THEY LIVED MOSTLY ON THE ISLAND OF MINDANAO AND IN THE PROVINCE OF SULU. THE MORO PEOPLE WERE (AND STILL ARE) DEVOUT FOLLOWERS OF **MOHAMMED**...

...THIS CAUSED QUITE A FEW PROBLEMS... (1)

illustrations that want into it. It was called *Mighty Men and Monster Maker*. It's a set of twelve plaques divided into three: head, torso and legs. There were six monsters and six superheroes and they all had interchangeable heads, torsos and legs, so you could make up any hero or monster you wanted. I pencilled the drawings and Dave inked them. It was so successful that I just did a new one named *Zoid Masters*.

RBCC: Great. Be looking forward to that.

DS: There was a *Master of Kung Fu*. One of those *what if* jobs where somebody else needed help on it and I took the last eight pages. Rick Hoberg had the job and Bill Wray was inking it, and we were all working full time at Hanna-Barbera at the time. I was doing these pages at night at home. Anyway, up against the wall, I had five pages left in partial stages of completion. I didn't have anyone else to call because everybody was either out of town or not good enough.

WS: So his last choice, in desperation...

DS: Bill had just gotten back from Seattle that night, it was around midnight. "Bill! Please come over!" He came and we worked right there in my little one-room apartment in Van Nuys. We didn't finish but we got a chunk of it done. I took all the pages with me to work the next day. I was sneaking 'em in between scenes of *Godzilla* on my light board there in the animation studio. Hoberg and I were passing them over the tops of the partitions. We passed those pages all around the studio. I probably shouldn't be saying this. A lot of people at Hanna-Barbera worked on that book.

RBCC: I always wondered why some of these Marvel jobs look a little...

DS: Rushed?

RH: Spotty?

RBCC: Inconsistent in places.

RH: Dave drew a Pugboo and inked a Risslaca with me.

RBCC: Oh?

RH: For years I've been doing DAW Book covers, and many of the books need pen and ink title page drawings. One time Dave begged me for work...

DS: I needed twenty-five dollars so bad.

RH: So I let him do one of the title page drawings for me. We didn't do the artwork together, but it was on the same project.

RBCC: What was the book?

RH: *The Magick of Camelot* by Arthur Landis.

WS: Oddly enough, one of the very first professional jobs I ever had was doing the covers and illustrations for a pulp magazine called *Coven 13*, which was edited by Arthur Landis. He began the *Magick of Camelot* series in that magazine, so some of my first illustration jobs were illustrating the same stories, the Pugboo and all of the other characters Richard and Dave illustrated ten years later.

RBCC: What have you done with Richard?

WS: I'm sometimes art director for *Varese Sarabande* Records. They do a lot of soundtracks and digital recordings. In fact, they have the largest digital catalog in the world. They were going to put out the digital recording of the *Empire Strikes Back* soundtrack. They got me to paint the cover. At the time I was working on *Conan*, and I found out that I was going to leave very shortly for Europe. So in 24 hours I painted the front cover to *The Empire Strikes Back* album and, since it was a wraparound cover, I laid in the back cover and then got what had been done approved by Gary Kurtz. I gave it to Richard and he painted the back cover. That's why there are two signatures on that painting.

RH: The morning of the day he left for Europe, I got a call from him. He said, "Hey, how'd you like to do half the cover?" He didn't have it finished, his plane was going to leave soon, so to bail his poor ass out of the fire (*Much laughter*); following the lay-in he'd already done and to his specifications, I painted the back cover.

RBCC: How does sharing a studio affect your work?

RH: Well, when you can't decide what to do, you go to the other two and they have ideas. So there are suggestions that Bill or I have given Dave that show up in *The Rocketeer*, little bits of my paintings that these guys suggested.

WS: Actually, Rich and I practically wrote *The Rocketeer*.

RBCC: Would you like to give a rebuttal to that, Dave?

(We all laugh. Dave leaves the room)

RH: About the most important advantage to the studio is having other artists around whom I respect and can believe in, so that when a problem comes up, rather than staring at it at midnight in your studio at home, you can ask someone else's opinion and get two or three or five different opinions to choose from.

WS: Beats consulting a t-shirt

seller.

RBCC: How long have you been together here?

RH: Since January of 1981, coming up in two years.

WS: I've been here about eight to ten years.

RBCC: How different is it for you, Bill?

WS: It's radically different. Years ago, before Dave and Rich moved in, I primarily used to work at night and the other guys worked during the day, so I'd rarely see them. I got lonesome. One of the things that a lot of fans don't realize is that the creation of art is a very lonely activity, it's basically just you and the drawing board, and it really does help to have other people to get feedback from. I know that Al Williamson likes to have someone in the studio when he's working, usually Carlos Garzon. Working with Ron Cobb for instance, on *Conan*, was terrific. And with the whole film crew, you just get so many different ideas to choose from. I think it's a real advantage.

When you work alone there's a dangerous tendency for your work to get a bit incestuous, for you not to be aware when you're falling into patterns. Whereas healthy criticism will keep you from doing that, keep you on your toes. I think the three of us are quite competitive, so we don't dare do anything bad lest the other ones see it.

RH: Yeah. Working on something and hearing these people snickering in the background does help a lot.

RBCC: I've noticed your art's really improved over the last two years, Bill (Laughter). Anything else to say about being together here?

WS: It's also great because an artist who works alone tends to be isolated socially, too. And though it doesn't seem like a major thing, you tend to lose a lot of your social graces. In subtle and not-so-subtle little ways it becomes apparent. One nice thing is we can come to work and find out there's a good show over at the art museum and go over to see it together. We can do different things, have lunch together. It keeps you from just developing a stay-at-home mentality. The hermit life.

RBCC: I've always felt that limited crativity.

WS: Our studio's right around the corner from a revival theatre.

RBCC: Let's get into that. How do the images you see in films and television shows affect your work? Do you consciously look to films for artistic inspiration or influence?

WS: Absolutely. They affect me quite directly because I work in film. It's like doing my homework as well as enjoying myself. Also, there are certain kinds of films I'll choose to see because I'm doing a certain kind of job and the atmosphere of the film will suggest inspiration. For instance, if I'm doing something light and whimsical, I may go see *Fantasia* or some fine Disney thing that would be inspirational along those lines. When I was doing my *Little Blue Brontosaurus* children's project, I went to see *Bambi* to sort of soak up the feeling I wanted to evoke in the painting I was doing.

RBCC: How about you, Dave?

DS: I see a lot of old movies, which probably shows. I go more for black and white imagery than color. I'm hoping, and I think it's starting to come out in my work, that I'm learning to use different types of shots rather than just standard two-shots. The talking head type of stuff is done a lot. Films help me to see different ways of telling a story rather than the

Bill Stout, Richard Hescox and Dave Stevens let their creativity run rampant in the Los Angeles studio they share.

standard comic ways. Different ways of heightening tension, of throwing the viewer into it.

RBCC: You get this from observing different methods of film framing?

RH: Different compositional possibilities.

WS: I think seeing the old films helps Dave in his writing, because the dialogue in them is so distinctive.

RBCC: And the whole look of the times they preserve. The cars, the planes, the clothes.

DS: Yeah. Somethimes I'll see a film that has an element I didn't consider putting in, like streetcars or something.

RBCC: Richard?

RH: In one regard, films affect me less than the other two because they work on comics, where there's a flow from panel to panel that's very similar to film. All of my work has been single illustrations. But I do soak up detail and design ideas from films. I work a lot in science fiction, so I go to all of the sf movies to see what the newest spaceships people are designing look like, so I can keep up with what's going on and, too, so that I can do different things that don't look like what everybody is seeing. I don't want to put Star Wars ships or Blade Runner spinners in everything. I have to be aware of what's going on to be sure of that. Also, there's a lot of mood that you can pick up in good movies. I also do movie posters like Bill does, so seeing movies is also like homework. Unfortunately, most of the movies I do work for are real low-budget stinkers, so my homework is more painful than his.

WS: I also derive a great deal of inspiration for the black and white films of the thirties. There's a certain look that James Wong Howe and a lot of the other great cinematographers got where they got these real velvety greys, phosphorescent whites that practically glow, and deep, rich blacks. In a lot of my black and white work, comics and pen and ink, I really try to evoke that richness and density of black, grey and white. I attribute that directly to those types of films. The photography is astounding in so many of those films, like Carol Reed's *The Third Man*, or *Island of Lost Souls* with Charles Laughton. Those whites glowed right through the jungle.

WILLIAM STOUT

RBCC: I first became aware of your work through your underground comics.

STOUT: I entered the comics field from a number of different directions. In 1967 I did one of the first undergrounds. It was for two local characters on the L.A. scene called *Those Lovable Peace Nuts*. I did that book in two weekends. I don't seriously consider it a part of my canon of work. I really started doing comics seriously when I started working with Russ Manning on the *Tarzan* strip around '71. I worked with Russ for a couple of years. I also did work for Dennis Ellefson for *Cycle*Toons*, then later *Car*Toons*. Dennis was a great editor in that he really gave me a chance to experiment with all kinds of different styles and really grow. This also gave me a chance to improve my lettering, which when I started to work on the magazines was awful. Now I get a lot of professional jobs that are just strictly lettering.

I had never seen any underground comics until I met Jim Evans. Jim did an underground called *Dying Dolphin*. He was also one of the first airbrush illustrators in Los Angeles. Jim was a close friend of Rick Griffin's and of the *ZAP* gang. Jim showed me a handful of these comics and I was astonished. I'd never seen anything in comics like what those guys had been doing. As it happened, on that same day we bumped into the *ZAP* gang coming out of the Cherokee Bookstore. I was inspired to do a two-page story called "Come Again" for Jim's *Dying Dolphin*. Jim ended up reserving all the pages in that book for himself and I later sold the "Come Again" pages to a magazine called *Flash*. I think they only had one issue. It was a *High Times*-type magazine.

That got me interested in the undergrounds, and after working on that story I started putting together my own book. It never came out, but pieces of it appeared in *Bicentennial Gross-Outs*, such as the "Realityland" story. Through that, and through meeting Ron Turner and Denis Kitchen, I started doing work off and on for the undergrounds through the years. I'm still doing underground stuff. I just did a cover for *Bizarre Sex* which I'm sure you won't be able to run with this interview.

RBCC: The most impressive thing about your underground work is that while each major strip is identifiably in your style, they're all filled with wonderful homages to the great comic artists. The thing you did in *Bijou #8* (a satire of Skip Williamson's *Snappy Sammy Smoot*) covered the whole MAD gang in just three pages. And "Filipino Massacre" in *Bicentennial Gross-Outs* evoked Reed Crandall in a number of places.

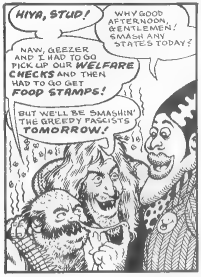
STOUT: I really wasn't going for Reed Crandall in "Filipino Massacre" so much as I was looking for a quick pen style. Unfortunately I didn't find it, and I ended up with a very slow pen style. It came close, in some ways, to some of the stuff that Giraud was doing at the time. I was also looking for a way to present a story documentary-style.

I'm sort of like an artistic sponge in that I can soak up styles and then cough them out again at will on the paper. It's sort of a challenge to do that, and at the same time it's a learning experience. When you study different artists' work you can pick up different things. Gradually, you develop your own style out of that. You try to pick out the things that you really like about each artist and incorporate them into your own work. I used to worry a lot about not having my own style because everything I would do would be in a different style. I gradually lost that worry as my own style slowly emerged despite myself. One homage I did in *Cycle*Toons* resulted in me working on *Little Annie Fanny* with Kurtzman and Elder. I did a story called "Motor Psycho", and this was right after I had discovered the old *Mad* comics. I was particularly bent by a story Kurtzman and Elder did about this character called the Mole in *Mad #2*. I was never the same after that. So I did this "Motor Psycho" story as a "thank you", in Elder's style with Kurtzman staging and a little bit of Wally Wood thrown in. I sent a copy off to Kurtzman and he wrote back asking if I'd like to work on *Little Annie Fanny*.

RBCC: What did you do on *Annie*?

STOUT: I was sort of sandwiched in between Harvey's pencils and Willy's finished. I worked on two episodes. They brought me back to New York and I lived in New Jersey near Willy Elder. I learned a lot working on that strip. I also happened to be there when they had the first EC Convention, so

SMASHIN' THE STATE DEPT.: LOOK AROUND ANY BIG CITY AND WHAT DO YOU FIND? DOPE! FILTH! PERVERSION! VIOLENCE! — YES, FOLKS, ALL THE LITTLE THINGS THAT GO TO MAKE CITY LIFE BEARABLE! YET, DESPITE THEIR ABUNDANCE, THERE ARE A FEW PEOPLE WHO ARE NEW TO THESE SIMPLE PLEASURES OF LIFE! ONE SUCH FELLOW IS THAT LOVABLE COMIC DING DONG...
SNAZZY MELVIN SNOOT!
HEY! LOOK, GEEZER! HERE COMES SNAZZY MELVIN SNOOT, CULTURAL HERO, WORLD WIDE RESPECTED BON VIVANT, AND ALL ROUND CHUCKLE HEAD! LISTEN! HE'S SPOUTING HIS CHARMING LITTLE GEMS OF WISDOM TO HELP YOU GET THROUGH THE BUSY DAY! THOSE FUN-SHLUBBINGER LITTLE SAYINGS THAT DON'T HAVE ANY RELATION AT ALL TO ANY LEVEL OF REALITY!
WHAT A HAPPY LOOKING SCHLEP!
HE'S FLYIN' HIGH ON CLOUD NINE!
NOT A CARE IN THE WORLD!
LET'S GET 'IM!
SKRITCH SCRATCH
DON'T WEE-WEE ON YOUR TEE VEE! DON'T CA-CA ON YOUR MARACAS! DON'T PO-PO IN YOUR COCOA! DON'T...
Stout73


HIYA, STUD!
WHY GOOD AFTERNOON, GENTLEMEN! WHAT'S ANY STATES TODAY?
NAW, GEEZER AND I HAD TO GO PICK UP OUR WELFARE CHECKS AND THEN HAD TO GO GET FOOD STAMPS!
BUT WE'LL BE SMASHIN' THE GREEDY FASCISTS TOMORROW!

YOU GOT ANY SPARE CHANGE, SNOOT?
NAW, WE'RE BROKE! FORK IT OVER!
WHY, YES! ARE YOU FELLOWS IN DIRE STRAITS?

'LATER, SNOOT!
YEAH!
GOOD PAY! AND "RIGHT ON!" WHAT NICE BOYS! BR-R-R IT CERTAINLY SEEMS TO BE GETTING COLD!
OH, GOODNESS! IT'S...

I was able to meet a lot of my heroes.

RBCC: Were you an EC fan as a child?

STOUT: I didn't see my first EC until I was in high school. That was the special flying saucer issue of *Weird Science-Fantasy*. I wasn't very impressed, it was pretty dull. One of the duller issues EC printed, sort of clinical. It wasn't until later, after seeing a wider representation of EC's, that it really hit me. At first I was introduced to EC's because I wanted to get all of Frazetta's comics. The first thing I did was buy all of the comics that had anything by Frazetta in them. Then there were a few Williamson stories that I wasn't quite sure about, so I got them too. Then I figured, since I already had most of the Williamson EC's. Then I worked for Kurtzman and saw the incredible layouts and writing in his books, so I figured I'd get all the Kurtzman. You can see where this is leading. Then I thought "Boy, the Wood science fiction stuff is *so* hot!"

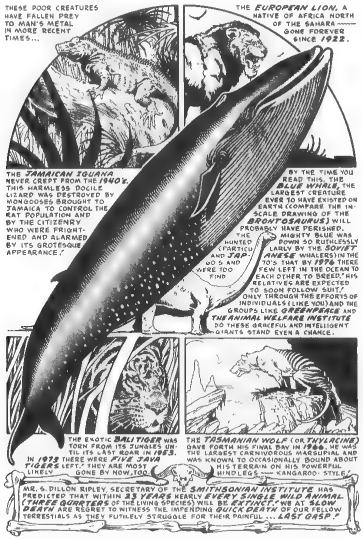
RBCC: That Mole character from *Mad* pops up in "Realityland".

STOUT: I became so enamored with the Mole that I started sneaking him in everywhere. I put him on a Firesign Theatre album cover, coming out from underneath the manhole. I've put him in a lot of different stories. I think I put him on some other record covers too. The Mole is it for me. It's the essence of Elder.

RBCC: I'm very impressed by the research that goes into a lot of your strips. That one about the extinct animals in *Slow Death #8*, with the scale drawings of the whale and brontosaurus...

STOUT: I found out the length of a brontosaurus and the length of a blue whale, then just used a little algebra to figure it out proportionately, how they should relate to each other. The mania for accuracy comes from working with Kurtzman, who's an absolute fanatic about it. I caught the same disease from him. It slows me down tremendously, but it gives me tremendous pride to know that everything that is in a story or is in a picture is accurate and I've gone to the trouble to research it and find out. For instance, when I was working on *Annie Fanny*, Kurtzman would not just draw a fire hydrant. He would take the piece of paper he was working on, go downstairs, walk out on the street, got to an actual fire hydrant and sketch it. I find that doing that gives your drawings and paintings a credibility that they would never have if you just tried to remember what a fire hydrant looked like. So I do that on everything. And there's my homage to Kurtzman on that Firesign cover: I went out and drew a fire hydrant.

RBCC: You did a three-page strip in *Fear & Laughter* in which the Hunter Thompson character comes out of a drug haze and realizes he's at the mercy of the


THESE POOR CREATURES HAVE FALLEN PREY TO MAN'S METAL IN MORE RECENT TIMES...
THE EUROPEAN LION, A NATIVE OF AFRICA NORTH OF THE SAHARA — GONE FOREVER SINCE 1922.
THE JAMAICAN IGUANA NEVER CREPT FROM THE 1940's. THIS HARMLESS DOLLIE LIZARD WAS DESTROYED BY MONGOOSES BROUGHT TO JAMAICA TO CONTROL THE RAT POPULATION AND BY THE CITIZENRY WHO WERE FRIGHT-ENED AND ALARMED BY ITS GROTESQUE APPEARANCE.
BY THE TIME YOU READ THIS, THE BLUE WHALE, THE LARGEST CREATURE EVER TO HAVE EXISTED ON EARTH (COMPARE THE IN-SCALE DRAWING OF THE BRONTOSAURUS) WILL PROBABLY HAVE PERISHED. MIGHTY BLUE WAS POWERFUL AND SO RUTHLESSLY HUNTED BY THE SOVIET ARMADA AND JAPANESE WHALERS IN THE 20'S THAT BY 1970 THERE WERE SO FEW LEFT IN THE OCEAN TO FIND EACH OTHER TO BREED, THAT RELATIVELY ARE EXPECTED TO SOON FOLLOW SUIT. ONLY THROUGH THE EFFORTS OF INDIVIDUALS (LIKE YOU) AND THE GROUPS LIKE GREENPEACE AND THE ANIMAL WELFARE INSTITUTE WHOSE GRANDFUL AND INTELLIGENT GIANTS STAND EVEN A CHANCE.
THE EXOTIC BALITIGER WAS TORN FROM ITS JUNGLES UNTIL ITS LAST ROAR IN 1953. IN 1978 THERE WERE FIVE JAVA TIGERS LEFT. THEY ARE MOST LIKELY GONE BY NOW, TOO.
THE TASMANIAN WOLF (OR TYLACINE) GAVE FORTH HIS FINAL BAY IN 1960. HE WAS THE LARGEST CARNIVOROUS MARSUPIAL AND WAS KNOWN TO OCCASIONALLY BOUND ABOUT HIS TERRAIN ON HIS POWERFUL HIND LEGS — KANGAROO - STYLE.
MR. S. DILLON RIPLEY, SECRETARY OF THE SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTE HAS PREDICTED THAT WITHIN 25 YEARS NEARLY EVERY SINGLE WILD ANIMAL (THREE QUARTERS OF THE LIVING SPECIES) WILL BE EXTINCT. WE AT SLOW DEATH ARE LOATH TO WITNESS THE IMPENDING QUICK DEATH OF OUR FELLOW TERRESTIALS AS THEY FUTILELY STRUGGLE FOR THEIR PAINFUL... LAST GASP!

GUNG!
HMMM! "MR. AGNEW" DOES NOT SEEM TO BE FUNCTIONING TODAY! WE USUALLY GET AT LEAST ONE "EFFETE"!
LET'S SPLIT MAIN DRAG NOW AND GET INTO ANOTHER PART OF REALITYLAND...
TARZA IN TROUBLE
TARZA IN TROUBLE
TARZA IN TROUBLE
TARZA IN TROUBLE
TARZA IN TROUBLE
TARZA IN TROUBLE
G.I. ADVENTURELAND! LAND OF ROMANCE! EXCITEMENT! FUN! V.D.- DISEASE! DEATH! OH BOY!
TARZA
KALA
FOR HEAVEN'S SAKE!
CHARLIE! HELP ME!
HEY, JOE! WHAT'S COOKING, GUMBO?
BLAM
BRAP
BRAP
BRAP
BRAP!
FUG BABEAUTH, YANKEE PIG!
RATTLE RATTLE
I'M GOOFBALL, SWEETHEARTS! I'LL BE YOUR GUIDE THROUGH G.I. ADVENTURELAND!

artist drawing the strip. Was this a conscious reworking of "Duck Amuck"?

STOUT: The Daffy Duck cartoon? No. If so, it was subconsciously. I think if there was any conscious influence, it would be the Kurtzman "3-D" story I've always liked the idea of looking at the medium of comics from a distance and seeing the absurdity of the staging of some of the situations. I like having the characters become aware that they're in this paper world that's printed with black ink. For instance, in this story, when Hunter S. Toxin gets shot he starts bleeding India ink. It's just my fascination of playing with the form, which is something I picked up from Kurtzman.

RBCC: I've never seen any mainstream comic work by you.

STOUT: I ghost-inked most of a Jack Kirby *Demon* for Mike Royer, everything but the figures. I think that was *Demon* #15. Also, that *Master of Kung Fu* we were talking about earlier. Then the *Tarzan* stuff, which was later reprinted by DC.

Getting back to the *Fear & Laughter* story, the structure of that story is one of my favorite structures. Besides the characters realizing they're in comics, it's a sort of elliptical structure, where it comes back onto itself. It's something I learned from working with the Firesign Theatre. I used it in this story in such a way so that the story doesn't really end. The character realizes he's in a comic strip, but then he thinks that perhaps he's not in a comic strip, maybe it's all the drugs he's taken that've backed up in his system. So then he sits down to wait it out until the drugs wear off. Of course, the drugs don't wear off. What you do is you turn the page and go into his next adventure.

RBCC: It's this kind of approach, coupled with the fact that you don't do mainstream comics, that signals to me that you view comics primarily as a means of personal expression.

STOUT: Absolutely. If I was independently wealthy, the two things I would do would be comics and oil painting. Since comics don't pay for the lifestyle I'm accustomed to, I have to relegate comics to mostly a spare time activity, which is unfortunate. But that's the way it goes. I like to eat in restaurants.

RBCC: How many album covers have you done for the Firesign Theatre?

STOUT: One when they were on Columbia and a couple since they've gone to Rhino Records. I also worked on a film with them called *Everything You Know Is Wrong*. I designed the graphics for the film, built a lot of the props, and was even an extra for the film. I did some advertising for Austin and Ossman for their show *Radio Laughs of 1940*.

RBCC: These album covers are very rich. Full of gags.

STOUT: The reason for that is I wanted to convey graphically what I got from listening to the Firesign. Their material is so rich; it's like *Mad* comics-type stuff. Which is another ellipitical storyline. But that was the only way I thought I could convey what was inside the record, to have an album cover that was as fun to look at as the album was fun to listen to.

RBCC: In addition to the album covers, you do a lot of film posters. Is there any difference in how you approach selling a

record and selling a movie?

STOUT: It's a little different. With movies you have to sell sex more. With album covers sometimes you have to deal with the band, which can be difficult. Initially, you're just dealing with an art director. But sometimes, after a cover's finished, it'll go under the band's scrutiny and the band'll mess it up (laughter). Movie posters pay much better and they go through many more changes. Because there's one hundred times the budget for advertising, they can ask for and get changes. I did twelve near-finished drawings before they finally picked the one that became the *Wizards* poster. And then that one got changed, too. The one with the skull and the flies was the teaser poster and then, at the last minute, four days before the release of the film, they decided that that might be too frightening for children. So they had me redo it. I took out the skull on the back of the saddle. I took out his eyes (they thought the glowing eyes were too threatening). I replaced the bones, skulls and flies with birds, mushrooms, flowers and butterflies.

RBCC: I like the first one better.

STOUT: So do I. Much stronger image.

RBCC: You had some difficulty with the cover you drew for a Beatles album.

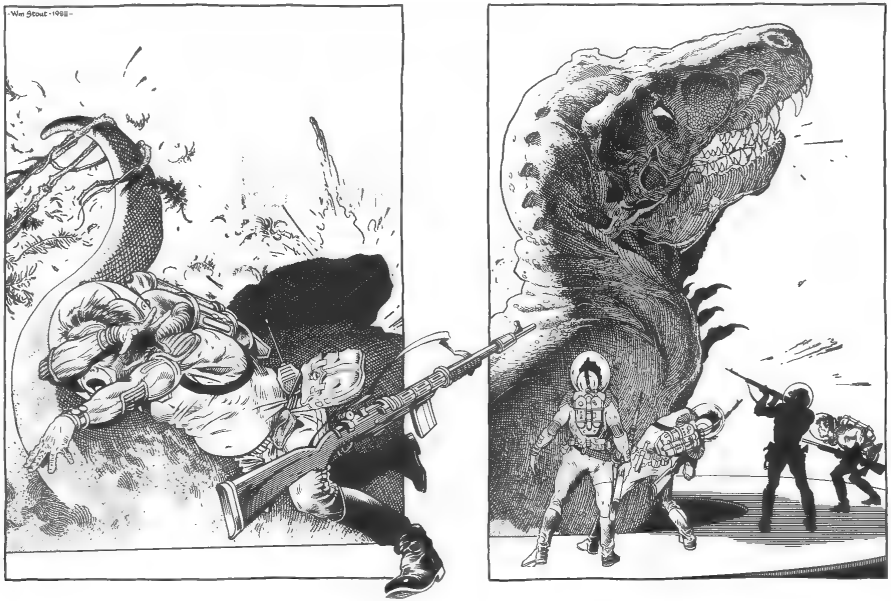
STOUT: I pretty much stated my whole position in a little manifesto I printed up. The album was called *Beatlesongs*, and it was songs by fans about the Beatles. "My Boyfriend got a Beatle Haircut", "Letter to the Beatles", "We Love You Ringo"; Beatles novelty tunes. I was trying to come up with different ideas for a cover, and one I got was why not show the people who are going to buy this record. So I showed a typical fan gathering at a Beatlemania convention. Then the thought crossed my mind: Boy, wouldn't it be in the worst taste, the absolute worst taste, to have as one of the fans Mark David Chapman, the guy who shot John Lennon? But the more I thought about it, the more I thought that to really show the whole range of fans it would be much truer to the original idea to show Chapman. Sort of as a warning to fans not to become such fanatics that they lose perspective on the people that they worship. I hoped it would make fans look at themselves, to see if there wasn't a little bit of Chapman inside them and to hopefully correct that, to get a better grip on reality. So I went ahead and put him in.

RBCC: Did the Rhino Records people catch it the first time through?

STOUT: Officially, they claim they didn't. Actually, when the person I showed it to saw it he collapsed in hysterics on the floor. He thought it was the greatest thing going. But to most of the other people who saw it we had to explain who that [Chapman] was, so we figured

no one would get the joke. It was kind of a black humor joke, which John Lennon himself was fond of perpetrating. We figured a few people might be upset, but we thought most people had a sense of humor and would understand. Well, they didn't. There was a tremendous uproar. I got frantic calls from the president of Rhino Records (who hadn't spotted Chapman on the cover) about how they were getting loads of hate mail from Beatles fans. They were getting their records returned to them in unopened boxes, out and out rejected by record sellers. They were worried and asked me if I'd change the cover, which I refused to do. I'd felt strongly about what I'd said and I thought that the very people this was upsetting were the people who needed to see it, who needed to take a look at themselves. They're the ones I'm trying to reach. *The L.A. Times* got wind of the controversy and put it on their front page. They also have a wire service that sent it out all over the country. It eventually ended up in *People* and all

ROLLING STONES
"ALL MEAT MUSIC"
Special Benefit Concert for the Nicaraguan Earthquake Victims
Recorded LIVE at the Forum in Inglewood, Calif.; 1-18-73
WINTER TOUR 1973
Our Story Thus Far:
BROWN SUGAR?
BITCH!
ROUTE 66
It's All Over Now
HAPPY
GIMMIE SHELTER
YOU CAN'T ALWAYS GET WHAT YOU WANT
ALL DOWN THE LINE
JUMPIN' JACK FLASH
Dead Flowers
Live With Me:
20 children, home for 3, nursery, butler, French maid, cook, chauffeur, footman. Send photo and letter Box 69-2120 S. Michigan Ave
NO EXPECTATIONS
Sweet Virginia
AMAZING!
RIP THIS JOINT
ALONG DOTTED LINE
NO SEEDS! NO STEMS! NO DOPE!
THEN, ROLL INTO TUBE SHAPE, LIGHT IT—AND SMOKE IT! TO YOUR SURPRIZE, ABSOLUTELY NOTHING WILL HAPPEN!!
PLEASE ALLOW ME TO INTRODUCE MYSELF
TRADE MARK
OF QUALITY!


Wes Stout - 1988 -

different kinds of magazines, including the national music publications like *Creem* magazine.

Rhino decided to recall the album and put it out with a different cover. Basically, they used the back cover, which is a photograph of someone's collection of Beatles novelties. Now the original album is a rare collector's item. Last I heard, it was going for $75.00. Rhino was very upset because they received death threats. I said, "If any of these people call, just give them my number and I'll explain to them what was going on." But none of them ever called. I did receive a few letters, though, which criticized the cover. I wrote those people back and explained my position and I usually received polite replies. Once people realized what I was trying to do they wholeheartedly went along with it. I wasn't trying to be a bad guy. John Lennon was my favorite Beatle.

RBCC: It seemed like an extremely deft joke to me when I first read about the controversy in the Times. After all, Chapman was a big Beatles fan.

STOUT: He was the ultimate Beatles fan. He colleted one of the Beatles.

RBCC: When an art director for a major film comes to you with a poster assignment, does he tell you exactly what he wants depicted?

STOUT: Sometimes they give

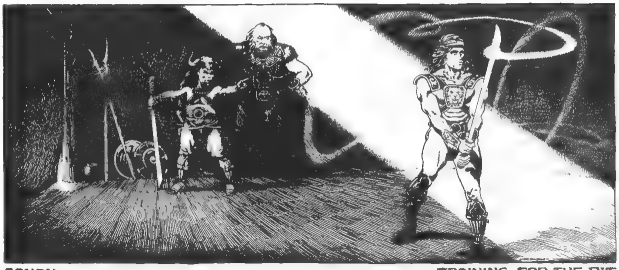
me very specific instructions, sometimes they leave it completely up to me. The *Wizards* poster was pretty much left up to me. They wanted to see a dozen ideas in my style. I've done three posters for Roger Corman: *The Lady In Red, Rock & Roll High School* and *Up From the Depths*. I came up with the idea for the *Rock & Roll High School* poster and executed it, with only one stipulation: Corman said, "Make it look just like *Animal House*." He was real happy with my work on that and *Up From the Depths*, so he felt confident enough to let me do whatever I wanted on *Lady In Red*. Since it was a period piece, I tried to make it look something like a violent *Saturday Evening Post* cover, and The Arrow Collarman gets in a car crash. As long as it had a car crash, Roger was happy. I was trying to evoke a J.C. Legendecker type of image. When they (a different company) asked me to do *The American Success Company* job, they said, "We'd show you a print of the film, except that it's so bad we were afraid you wouldn't do as nice a job." Oddly enough, Phil Proctor of the Firesign Theatre told me a year later that it was quite a funny film. It was recently re-released as *Success*.

RBCC: Is *Conan* the first film you've done storyboards for?

STOUT: Yes, unless you consider T.V. commercial films. The *Conan* storyboards weren't storyboards in the strict form, because Milius wanted them to look like comic book pages. It wasn't the first film I'd worked on. There was the Firesign film, and the *Buck Rogers* TV show, which was originally going to be three two-hour movies. I've done a lot of work to help sell films. A lot of times, a producer or a director or a writer will have a project that he wants to sell, and he will commision me

to do a fake movie poster or an attractive cover for the script. It's something he can point to and say this is what the film's about. Since most people don't like to read, they'll at least look at pictures that hopefully will get them interested in the project. We sold *Terror Train* that way. There wasn't even a script. It secured backing soley on the the title and my art.

RBCC: Are you doing anything



CONAN

TRAINING FOR THE PIT

like that for any upcoming films?

STOUT: Not that specifically. I just did some lettering samples for the Frazetta movie *Fire and Ice*. I did some caricatures of Dan Aykroyd for *Doctor Detroit*. With ninety percent of the movie stuff, you never know if it's ever going to be used or not.

RBCC: Getting back to the *Conan* storyboards, how do you approach the drawing of something which the physical plan of a film is going to be made from?

STOUT: Well, I had a lot of help in that I had John Milius as a director and this genius Ron Cobb as the production designer, so I could always come to them with any questions I had. But I started out doing regular storyboards and Milius said, "No, no, I want you to do the film the way you see it because I already know shot for shot what the film is going to look like all the way through." He said he wanted to know what I would do if I was the director. That way, if I came up with ideas he liked better than his own, he could pull from those and add them to the film. And Ron's drawings set the style for the film. What we were trying to do was sort of undesign things, design things back into history. Whereas you can see, say, how English fashion developed from the year 1200 up to the year 1600, go from the year 1200 and design it back several thousand years. We wanted *Conan* to look real historical, as if there really was a Hyborian Age.

RBCC: How was that done?

STOUT: We got lots of reference books on medieval and Amurai and Celtic designs. We used those and we tried to sort of unthink them, simplify them and also add more earth elements, add more animal skins and horns and antlers and more things made from nature. We also started thinking about the religious cultures they would've had, how there would've been worship of animals and the elements. We tried to incorporate these into each culture we designed. When I started doing the storyboards I was also designing the sets and costumes at the same time. If you look at the storyboards you can see that every character has a different set of armor. For that reason the storyboard were taking me five days per page. So I quit doing the storyboards after the second month to do what Ron was doing, which was production design. I did all of the detail and different things that Ron didn't have time for while he was designing the buildings. I did that for a year and a half. I got to design an enormous variety of things.

RBCC: How does the visual plan of the finished film compare to your pre-production visualization?

STOUT: Visually it was fairly close. There were details in the drawings of things that got cut out of the film. That always happens. It was frustrating watching the film for the first time, because you saw

things we spent months designing pass by in two seconds. You felt like crying out, "Wait a minute! I spent three months on that! Pan just a little slower!" But on seeing the film a second time, you realize that it was not meant as a display of your production design skills, but is meant to tell a story. So I think I contributed the most in the beginning of the film. Many of the designs I did were for the Cimmerian village. I was astounded really, to see my village spring to life on the screen. I was startled at how close that was.

RBCC: I'll tell you right now that I didn't like the film very much, but it was pretty impressive visually. Did you have much input into the later scenes like the orgy room and James Earl Jones' castle?

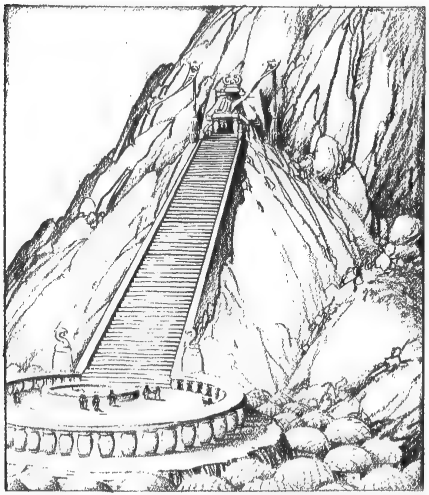
STOUT: The look of the film was its strongest point. The orgy chamber was completely designed by Cobb. I contributed exterior designs to the Mountain of Power and also King Osric's castle and the witch's hut, but primarily it was Ron's vision. I was a bit disappointed by the way it was lit, you really couldn't see the sets to their best advantage. I don't mean like what we were talking about before, the set designer stuff. I just don't think the richness of the sets could've added a lot to the story. They could've evoked more color and resonance.

RBCC: The tower sequence was quite disappointing. I was expecting something on the ornate level of Barry Smith's "Tower of the Elephant". Even Howard's original description of it was so rich.

STOUT: You should've seen Cobb's original drawings and designs for it that got cut from production because of budget reasons. That was a real tragedy. There were times on the film when the producers were talking to Ron and I was in the next room, just ready to jump through the door, because I was listening to them cut out really key designs, incredible designs. I felt like it was the equivalent of cutting the Yellow Brick Road out of *The Wizard of Oz*. Certain things that you need to give the picture a credibility and a sense of wonder. Unfortunately, making a film is a series of compromises.

RBCC: Does this experience encourage you to want to do this kind of work on other films?

STOUT: Yes and no. Yes because it's fun to work on films. It's great to work with a large group of people and develop a sort of second family. And it reaches so many people. But on the other hand, the film business is so incredibly corrupt. It's full of vicious...the worst people you'd ever want to meet, and certainly would never want to work for. So there's the ying and the yang, the push and the pull. Right now I'm waiting to find out whether I'm going to be production designer on a science



CONAN MOUNTAIN of POWER

fiction comedy. At this point it looks pretty good because most of the people working on the film are friends of mine. So it might be a real positive experience, although *Conan* was a real positive experience. Some of the people working on that film, who shall remain nameless, were such caricatures of Hollywood villainous types that to me it was very funny. I just couldn't believe that they were actually behaving that way. It's a shame that their behavior affected the final, ultimate quality of that film. They just had different priorities in life, and they didn't believe in the film the way I did.

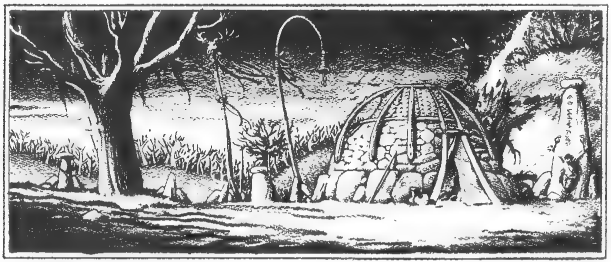
RBCC: I'm sure you've been a Howard fan for a long, long time.

STOUT: Since the Frazetta covers. It would've worked better if they'd stuck with John's (Milius) script. His script was

absolutely incredible. So many beautiful, key scenes were rushed, I feel, in the shooting or cut, or worse, just *completely* cut out. What John had written was so beautiful. He was writing as we were designing the film, and he would come in every week or every few days with new pages. He'd be so excited, he'd sit there and read them to us. And some parts were so moving and beautiful that we'd be sitting there and I'd be crying. I was so disappointed that a lot of that didn't get on the screen.

RBCC: Ever stop to ask yourself why you're so into dinosaurs?

STOUT: There's a large part of me that is the kid that never grew up. I was bitten by the dinosaur bug when I saw the original *King Kong* at the drive-in in the San Fernando Valley. It had a dramatic effect upon



CONAN THE WITCH'S HUT

me. It scared the hell out of me. I was probably about four. Shortly after that I saw the "Rite of Spring" sequence from *Fantasia*. They've stayed with me ever since. I remember drawing dinosaurs whenever I could.

A few years ago, my friend Don Glut was revising his book *The Dinosaur Dictionary*. He approached me and asked if I'd like to do some drawings for the book and some of the new dinosaurs that had been discovered. He wanted at least one picture of each new species. Here was a chance to do the first drawing of many of these creatures and have my image established with that creature's name, much the way Charles R. Knight did back around the turn of the century, and actually define some of these creatures for the rest of the world. So, what started out as about five dinosaurs ended up being around forty. That book is due out in November. It was originally due out four years ago. Each dinosaur drawing I did, I got more involved with research and more involved with portraying the dinosaur accurately. I felt I was obligated to the public to present the creature with as much accuracy as possible, with as much information as was known at the time. So I began consulting with different paleontologists. Each drawing was done from skeletons. Then I became involved with the backgrounds, putting the right plants with the right creature. What happened ultimately with that was that Byron Preiss was visiting me. We'd worked together before on the *Illustrated Harlan Ellison* and the *Illustrated Beach Boys Biography*, and he was pleased with the way those had turned out. He was looking around my studio and he said, "If you could do a book on anything you wanted, what would you do?" I said, "I dunno," and he looked at the various prehistoric paintings around the studio and my collection of toy dinosaurs and asked if I'd like to do one on dinosaurs. Thinking he was just being conversational, I said, "Sure." I forgot about it completely until two months later when he called up and said, "I've got the book deal with Bantam." So suddenly I had this 160-page dinosaur book to produce at the same time I was working on *Conan*. I thought I could do both at the same time, but it turned out *Conan* was taking all my time. So after five or six months of *Conan* in Europe, I quit to come back to the United States with just enough time to do the dinosaur book. It took nine months, twelve to sixteen hours a day, seven days a week. I delivered the last five drawings by hand in New York.

RBCC: Who are your favorite artists?

STOUT: The *Dinosaur Book* is the one thing I would call consistently in my style more than anything. There are, throughout the book, several homages to different illustrators who are my favorites, such as Alphonse Mucha. There are no J.C. Leyendecker dinosaurs, but he's one of my favorites. Edward Detmold, the English illustrator, had a tremendous influence on the book. He specialized in nature illustrations. Of course, Frank Frazetta. Those guys who were working at the turn of the century doing what they used to call Christmas gift books, such as Arthur Rackham, Dulac. All

those styles I've tried to take apart and reassimilate, then produce as my own.

RBCC: What would you say are the most satisfying aspects of each of the various fields you work in?

STOUT: With comics, it's telling a story with pictures. If you can do it without words, then you can tell that story to anyone in the world. However, with still pictures or oil paintings, you can really concentrate on one image and the challenge there is to have that one image tell a story all in itself. I find both of those satisfying when I'm able to pull it off, frustrating when I'm not.

Storyboards are a means to an end. Doing storyboards for films has enabled me to work with some of the best directors in the world: John Milius, earlier this year I did some storyboards for a film called *First Blood* and I was able to work with Ted Kotcheff, who directed *North Dallas Forty*. By working with them, it's like being paid to go to film school. I'm studying with the best people and getting paid for it at the same time.

RBCC: Do you want to get behind a camera some day?

STOUT: Absolutely. The reason I take the storyboard and production design jobs is that I want to learn every aspect of filmmaking. I hope to get some editing jobs. Ultimately, I want to make my own pictures.

RBCC: What satisfaction do you get out of the advertising jobs?

STOUT: The satisfaction is being able to buy most anything I want to buy. Being able to purchase bronzes by Antoine Louis Sanye, not having to worry about the rent or where the next meal's coming from.

RBCC: Are there any creative rewards? The satisfaction of a job well done?

STOUT: I almost always get tremendous satisfaction from my work. Once I elect to take on a commercial job it stops being a commercial job. I'm doing it for myself, to please myself. I figure if I can please myself and do my best work then it's obviously going to please the client. I think one of the talents that I have is that I can put myself in the regular guy's shoes. I grew up in the San Fernando Valley, which is a whole city of regular guys. I'm very familiar with the mass audience and I think I can turn right in to a mass audience appeal. I'm quite fortunate to be able to do that. That talent is very saleable in the commercial world. One thing I learned form reading Norman Rockwell's autobiography is a wonderful motto that he has. He has a little, gold-plated sign that says "100 PERCENT". That's to remind himself that no matter what he does, he should always put a hundred percent of his best effort into it. No matter what job I get, as soon as I elect to take that job, that's it. People who hire me are going to get my very best work, the best I can do. That way you never have anything come back to haunt you from your past. And it keeps you growing artistically, it keeps your skills growing because you're always demanding things of yourself. And it keeps you from stagnating. Eventually, the skills you pick up on a commercial job can be applied to your own personal work, so it pays off in a variety of ways.

DAVE STEVENS

RBCC: Most comic artists develop craft and style over a period of several years, but you seemed to appear fully blown out of nowhere, writing and drawing *The Rocketeer*.

STEVENS: (Did you hear that, Rick?) Well, most artists start out a lot younger than I did.

RBCC: You're 26?

STEVENS: Yeah.

RBCC: I know you did other stuff besides this two-page strip in the *Fear & Laughter* underground before *Rocketeer*, but this is all I've seen.

STEVENS: The other stuff is pretty obscure. I don't think you could find it even if you knew what to look for. Most of it was published in Europe. Tarzan stuff for Edgar Rice Burroughs (Inc.). I don't think any of it was printed here. I don't think I ever did one complete story myself. I was like a technician, inking someone else or working over someone else's layouts. And it was real awful, I hadn't learned to draw yet. I'm still learning to draw.

RBCC: Was that your first comic work?

STEVENS: I think so. I started with Russ Manning on the Sunday [Tarzan] strip, and then the European stuff was within that year and the year after. After that I did paintings with John Pound for awhile in San Diego. Then I left to come up here because there's no work down there. I really hadn't planned to get back into comics. I would help somebody out when they had a deadline problem and needed an extra hand. I helped out on one issue of Marvel's *Star Wars*, and that *Master of Kung Fu*. But it was never all that important to me to go back east or communicate with Marvel or any of that stuff. Somewhere between junior high school and *Tarzan* I just lost a lot of enthusiasm for working for the majors. One of those things where you get older and your priorities change. I tended toward advertising for a long time.

RBCC: How were you brought back into comics?

STEVENS: I had just left Filmation (a Hollywood animation studio) out of sheer frustration. I'd worked for every house in town (including Bakshi. I worked there for one day). I was fed up. There's no satisfaction for anybody who professes to be an artist, or has any real ability, in animation. It goes through too many hands, and by the time you see it on the screen it doesn't look anything like what you did.

RBCC: You just feel like a cog in a machine.

STEVENS: A cog that's had a couple of corners chipped out of it. You feel like your time is being wasted; you're not performing any service. Anyway, that was kind of an excuse to get out. So I went back to advertising for about a year. Then the Pacific Comics people came up to me at a convention and told me they needed a backup feature for a book they were coming out with called *Star-Slayer*. They asked if I wanted to do a six-pager for it. At first I wasn't too crazy about the idea, but I thought about it and started having fun with it. Before I had any idea what I was going to do, I sat down and did an ad, just a spur of the moment thing. I hadn't decided to make Betty a character or to use G.B.'s (airplanes), I just stuck it all in. But I didn't know what I was going to do storywise. I wrote it around the ad.

RBCC: Did the Pacific people have any idea of what they wanted the strip to be about?

STEVENS: No. At first I was going to do a heroine, a *Torchy*-type with a lot of tease, but there was really nothing I could do with that except slapstick. It can't be taken seriously. I wanted to do *Rocket Man, Commando Cody*. I had wanted to do that for years; I'd even had pages in my sketchbook I'd done years before Pacific came to me. So I tried like crazy to get ahold of someone who knew who had the rights to it, publicationwise. I found the ownership rights to the actual serials, which are on videocassettes now, but nobody knew who owned the print rights. I ran around, called back east. So rather than take the chance of having some little old man come out of the woodwork after I'd done it and sue me claiming that he had ownership, I'd just do the next best thing: Create something close, but not so close that I'd get into legal trouble. And this way it's easier because I don't have to stick with somebody else's characterization.

RBCC: You don't see too much personal style in the mainstream comics anymore; thematic obsessions, recurring visual metaphors.

STEVENS: It all looks the same.

RBCC: You, on the other hand, seem to be actively trying to rekindle the style used in comics of the late 40s and early 50s. I also know you're hot for Betty

Page.

STEVENS: (Much laughter) To me, she's flawless. I've always gravitated toward a certain look, and somewhere in my pre-pubsecent growth I ran into an old magazine from the fifties with a picture of Betty inside. From that point on, that was my image of the whole feminine ideal. There was nothing that ever topped that; kind of a fresh-faced girl-next-door with a big smile and rosy cheeks.

RBCC: There's something enchanting about the glamour art and photography of the postwar era.

STEVENS: I love it. It's my favorite period for that sort of thing. It's so appealing. I collect old cheescake. The photography got a little better in the late fifties. It's more what's inferred, what's implied rather than what's shown that makes it so titillating. The tops of stockings, bare backsides; you never saw anything, really. Makes the mind of a little boy just go crazy. It was so much more seductive than it is now, where everything's just wide open, right there.

RBCC: The same approach was used in the "Good Girl" comic art of that period.

STEVENS: Yeah, that was all tease. Short skirts, high heels, whips, bondage in outer space stuff.

RBCC: You're trying to bring that back into comics.

STEVENS: Only because it's appealing to me. It's something that I've missed in comics for years. There's none of it anywhere. They don't draw women in an appealing manner, at least not to me. They're all these vengeful warrior types. I don't like the kind of female image where she's always in armor and

tights and always has her jaw set. I would much rather see something like *Sheena*, where there's a softness that you notice. She was almost a female version of Tarzan. Still, she was definitely a woman. She wasn't harshly featured, or muscle-bound, or mannish in any way.

In the *Rocketeer* series, Betty's going to be a definite personality. There's going to be an element of tease, but she's certainly not going to be portrayed as just a pleasure object for men.

RBCC: I see some conflict developing already between her and Cliff.

STEVENS: Yeah, that's what makes it interesting to me, that push-pull. If everything's all rosy, there's no depth, no believability...she's an individual.

RBCC: It looks like they're going to have some good fights.

STEVENS: She's ahead of her time. This is the thirties, you know. She's a little strong-willed. It'll be a fun story to unravel.

RBCC: Any other comic projects on the boards?

STEVENS: There's one thing I did in '77 for Sanrio Films called *Aurora*. It was a female character on another world. Hopefully, I'll be bringing that back. I've got to look it over and see what needs to be done. It's pretty rough right now. I'll probably re-dialogue it and then do a second story.

RBCC: This is the strip you did for Japanese distribution?

STEVENS: As far as I know, nobody's ever seen it. I don't even know if it was ever actually published in Japan. I never saw copies of it. All the rights reverted back to me a couple of years ago, so I've just been sitting on it.

I'm going to be doing a horror story for Bruce Jones' book for Pacific. I've also got... I don't know if you'd call it a children's book or not. I'm trying to put together a package to present as a possible animated feature. I've worked on this off and on for a couple of years. I don't know if I'll have Pacific do something with it initially or if I'll go to somebody else. I haven't decided what format to do it in. Book form, comic form, text with illustrations. I've boarded a few little sequences in it and I've done some production paintings, sculptures, figure studies, just the bare basics of developing the thing.

RBCC: What's going on with *Betty Page Comics*?

STEVENS: I don't know. I'm kind of afraid, until I can maybe get in touch with her, to actually do more than just that cover. But they did do those Betty Page reprint books and she didn't say "boo" about that. But this is something that stands to make money and I don't know if those things really made all that much. The cover was done as kind of a joke. It's a spoof on *Thunda* #1.

RBCC: Do you have ideas for Betty Page stories?

STEVENS: It would definitely

just be a one-shot, you couldn't do much more than one issue of it. It would just be for laughs, it'd be real slapstick. I don't know if I'd do the whole book or just one story.

RBCC: What film work have you done?

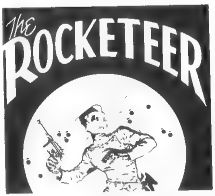
STEVENS: A lot of promotional roughs and comps. I don't know that I've ever done a finished poster. I'm not that adept yet.

RBCC: What was the sequence you storyboarded for *Raiders of the Lost Ark*?

STEVENS: It was cut out of the film before they even shot it. It was too expensive to do. It would have required finding a suitable location to dress as Hong Kong, and they certainly didn't have the money to go over and shoot it there. The scene took place in a museum setting. I guess you'd call it a destruction sequence. It involved finding one of the extra pieces to that thing that told where the ark was.

RBCC: Do you have any of that artwork?

STEVENS: I've got xeroxes of some of it. Lucas films has all of the originals somewhere in a vault. I was originally hired to do the boards for the whole film, but it was the first film I'd ever done and it was just too much for me. I couldn't get 'em out fast enough. Plus, Steven (Spielberg) wanted fully inked, rendered, toned panels. He was going on the assuption that they were going to reproduce them in a coffee table book later. Lucas told me, "Nah, you don't need to put all that work into it." It was taking too long, I wasn't getting enough done. Even cutting the work down from that, I was just too slow. They brought in another guy and then another guy after that. Between the two of them they got the thing done. After my sequence,



we reached a kind of mutual agreement that I just was not cut out for that kind of work. What they needed was quick dirty stuff that worked mechanically, and that's what they wound up with.

RBCC: You weren't ready for such an intense job at the time?

STEVENS: I didn't know what I was doing. I probably should've been working under another storyboard artist, watching to see what he did, so I could ape his methods of getting it out fast enough.

RBCC: Would you ever like to tackle that kind of job again?

STEVENS: Yeah. It was fun.

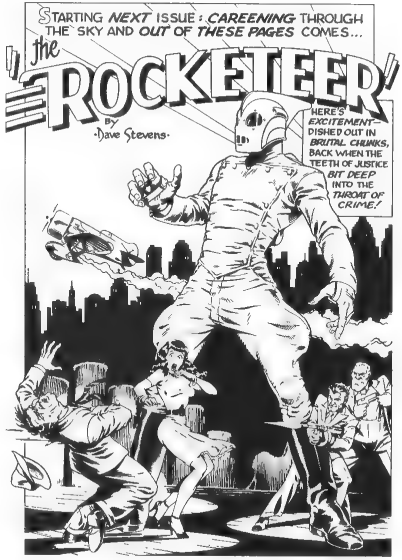
RBCC: I see, framed on your wall, your "Russ Manning Most Promising Newcomer" Award from the last San Diego Con.

STEVENS: Yeah. I'm full of promises. That's the only award I've ever gotten in my life, I've never won anything before. I guess it means I'm recognized for something. For making a lot of promises.

RBCC: As we all know, Russ is no longer with us. I assume the award was named after him for that reason, but since you worked with the man, does it carry some extra sentimental meaning for you?

STEVENS: Yeah, it definitely does. I owe him alot, he was a great person to work for and a good friend. I guess it's named after Russ to call attention to the fact that he was always very supportive of young artists. He'd always take the time to look at people's work and encourage them. He was always real generous with his time and very helpful. He was quite a patron of the Con. He came every year and always paid his own way, did drawings for the auction.

He hired quite a few of us over a long span of time. He started Mike Royer, Bill (Stout), me, Rick Hoberg, Bill Wray, Danny Bulanadi who's at Marvel now. He was the kind of a guy who gave a lot. I think it's nice they did this for him, because Russ certainly deserved to have some kind of memorial thing, because he did so much for them.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RICHARD HESCOX

RBCC: How did you get started in fantasy illustration?
HESCOX: I went to school at the Art Center of Design in L.A. I was always a fan of comics and I loved fantasy artwork. I was really influenced by the *Creepy* and *Eerie* Frazetta covers. At the time I wanted to do illustration like that, but in art school I shoved that aside as not being a realistic career. It was a little frivolous. Then, after graduating and working at a bunch of mundane, boring jobs, I thought it looked a little more attractive. So I started doing fantasy painting samples on my own to get a portfolio together. My first job came when I showed my artwork at the San Diego Convention in 1973. Neal Adams, along with several other people including a young man named Dave Stevens, noticed my artwork. Neal suggested that I send him some photographs that he could show around Marvel. With much delay, they finally did give me my first professional job, which was the cover for a black and white horror magazine, *Monsters Unleashed #7*. Then followed, very slowly, three other covers for their black and white magazines. It was not a terribly happy business arrangement in that their art direction policy was to retouch heavily anything anybody sent them no matter what. In fact, one cover I did for them twice. I did the painting, sent it to them, they retouched it heavily, then called me and said, "it no longer resembles your style so we're sending it back to you to retouch the retouching." When I got it back it was horribly mutilated, so I did the entire painting over again, a second painting, with the changes they wanted but in my style. I sent that back to them and, not having learned their lesson from the first one, they retouched that one heavily. It wound up even worse than the first one, and that's the one that was published. It looked so little like my painting, that from then on I pretty much decided that I didn't care to work for Marvel.
RBCC: What painting was that?
HESCOX: *Savage Sword of Conan #13.*
RBCC: Does look weird. What happened after you and Marvel parted?
HESCOX: For a year I didn't do very much professionally. A couple of boring jobs.

Mostly I worked at the Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History, in the Exhibits Department. I did such creative things as picking peanut shells out of the dinosaur exhibits and cleaning glass. Occasionally I retouched paintings and restored artifacts.
RBCC: Has that helped at all with your fantasy artwork?
HESCOX: I learned a great deal at the museum on very obscure subjects. I picked up a lot about paleontology, which I've always been interested in, and a number of other sciences. I also learned a lot about carpentry. I learned how to sandblast, how to make models and cast in resins and use all kinds of esoteric chemicals. But not much that applied directly to my career.

Then I sent my portfolio to a number of people, including DAW books, and Donald Wolheim started sending me work. So for four years now, I've been getting a steady stream of paperback books from him. After the first few had come out and I had some good, published work to show, I started upgrading my portfolio, sending it around to other people. Slowly, I made progress getting other clients. Just prior to my moving into the studio, I started getting a little bit of movie work. I did behind-the-scenes artwork that'll never be seen by anybody for *Escape From New York*, *Ghost Story*, *Halloween III*, *E.T.* and *Time Bandits*. One thing I did was for the movie *The Howling*. The main werewolf was supposed to be an amateur artist. So to decorate

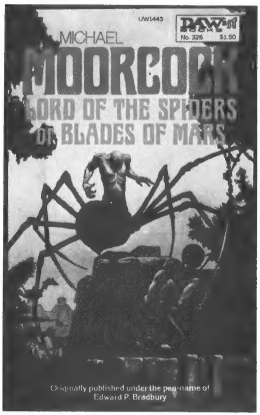
his apartment they needed drawings done by him in a very bestial and gutsy style. I was hired to do those drawings and everybody got to see those for a split second on screen. I also did the scientific drawing in the doctor's file of a man changing into a werewolf that had blood splattered on it during the murder scene of one woman.

RBCC: When you say behind-the-scenes on things like *E.T.* and *Ghost Story*, are you talking storyboards?

HESCOX: No. I'm talking about the advertising work. For most movies, they have a number of comps done from which they only choose one or two to be made into posters. I'll get the assignment, paint it and then it'll be seen by the studio, and that's it. Sometimes mine is chosen, and I get to do the finished poster, such as for *Swamp Thing* and *Death Valley*.

RBCC: Your concept for *E.T.* has a lovely, "lost and far from home" mood to it. When you're sent a paperback cover assignment, are you told which scene they want you to depict, or do they let you read the book and choose the one you like the best?

HESCOX: Different companies work differently. DAW sends the manuscript to the artist. I read it, then I pick three or four scenes that I think would be good. I do little quick sketches of each, send them back, and then they pick the one they want. Only very seldom do they not like any of them and need extra sketches. Pretty much all of the creativity on the cover is mine. Only once in a long while will a suggestion be added, like make the sky greener or the ship more complex. I've only gotten about three suggestions like that in twenty-five book covers.



Also, there's usually one scene in each book that I want to do the most, so I'll put extra work into that sketch. Again, only about three out of twenty-five times have they chosen a sketch I didn't want to do. So that works. Hints to artists.

RBCC: Have you worked for any other publishers besides DAW?

DAVE STEVENS: Larry Flint!

HESCOX: Just Marvel. My main clients are DAW and various movie companies. That's about it. And of course, Schanes & Schanes. The portfolio they published of my work two years ago, called *The Fatal Beauty*, available in stores.

RBCC: What branch of fantasy art do you enjoy working in the most?

HESCOX: Besides naked women? Guy-Girl-Goon. I better explain that. Some unnamed artist was talking with an editor at Marvel who was explaining at great length what he wanted on a cover. He went on and on with endless verbosity about all of these concepts and details that he wanted, which wound up sounding pretty much like all the other covers they always have on those magazines. After this guy had given this huge explanation, the unnamed artist said, "Oh. You mean Guy-Girl-Goon." Which is now the standard name for illustrations that have one hero, one heroine and a monster menacing them both. That is not my favorite genre, that's the one I get stuck with the most. My favorite genre within fantasy or science fiction has to hinge around the people and animals, as compared to the hardware which a lot of artists zero in on. I like flesh.

RBCC: The last time I was here I saw an incredible Clint Eastwood western painting. What's the story on that?

HESCOX: Well, although I've been doing movie work for a long time and everybody seems to like my painting, they can't make the jump from the fact that I can paint good to the fact that I can paint portraits good. Of course, portraits and likenesses are very important in movie posters. I needed a sample that showed a likeness, so I decided to paint a portrait that looked like a movie poster of some recognizable star. I worked on and off on it between other projects for some time.

RBCC: When I saw it, I thought Great! Eastwood's finally doing another western!

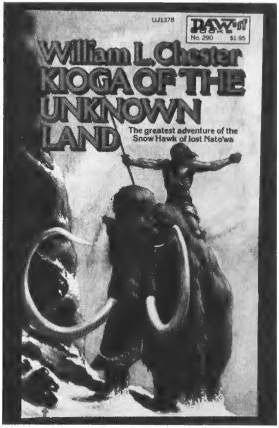
HESCOX: Yeah, everybody asks me what movie it's from, but it's just my imagination. It's the Clint Eastwood movie I would make if I were a director.

RBCC: Where do you see your career going?

HESCOX: Left on Wilshire Blvd. about four blocks down. In terms of my career, I'd like to expand away from fantasy simply because it'll bring in more money and more jobs. I seem to get typecast a lot with fantasy or horror movie jobs. But if I was going to make the same money, survive and do whatever kind of paintings I wanted, I would stick with fantasy and science fiction because that's a lot more interesting and fun to paint. I like the genre.

RBCC: Do you ever see yourself attempting comic strips?

HESCOX: In the back of my mind I have a desire to, but I do not see that I ever will, primarily because by the time you reach my age you should've had a lot more practice at it than I have and it's too late to go back and start over. The dues-paying, the early crappy work I would have to do to come up to any good level, would be too long of an investment to pay at this time. And watching Dave starve to death on the low pay of comics, I don't think I ever will.



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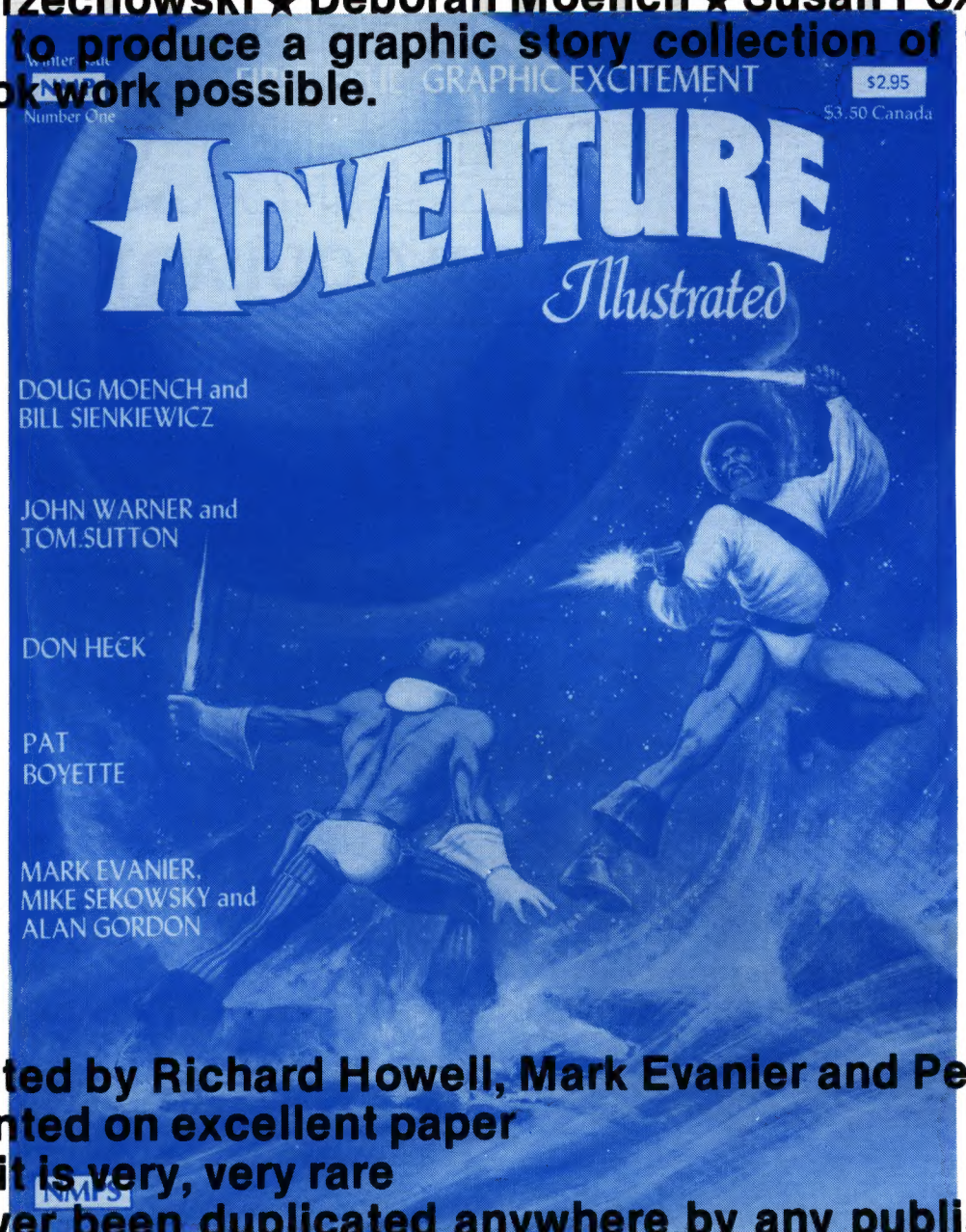

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